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ESMOND

A STUDY

J. MAXWELL BROWN, M.A.

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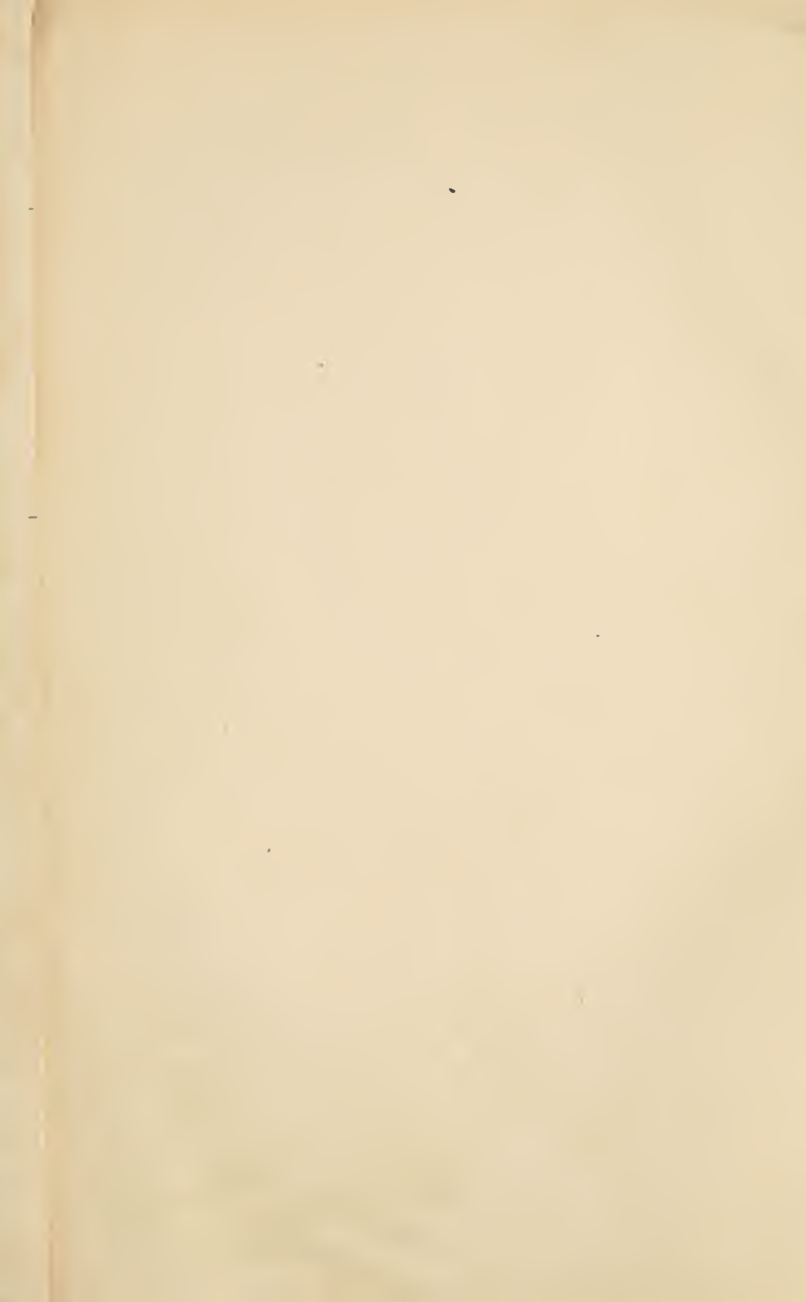
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A STUDY

J. MACMILLAN BROWN, M.A.

(Professor of English Literature, Canterbury College).



CHRISTCHURCH, WELLINGTON AND DUNEDIN, N.Z.

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A system of selling copies of Notes of my Lectures all over New Zealand, and complaints of the imperfections of many of these copies led me to print this series delivered during the session 1894. And now that they are printed, their success has encouraged me to submit them in book-form to a wider audience.

J. MACMILLAN BROWN.

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THE PLACE OF "ESMOND"
AMONGST THACKERAY'S NOVELS.



THE PLACE OF
"ESMOND"
AMONGST THACKERAY'S NOVELS.

TO understand an imaginative book thoroughly one element is absolutely essential; and that is a full knowledge of the time of life at which it was written. As a rule it bears marks of this upon its spirit and art. But superficial and desultory readers fail to see them and hence fail to know more than the title and theme of it. They read as they go to the theatre or other place of amusement only to fill in the time of life pleasantly. He who has a purpose in his existence must read differently; he must study his books with power, letting none straggle uselessly from the ranks. To such a reader the first question in choosing amongst an author's productions is when he wrote them. For a youthful book, even if it be a book of genius, differs by a whole world from a book of manhood and later life. It has none of the wise grasp of the foundations of life that comes only from long suffering and toil. It has none of the tolerant outlook that knows the far-reaching issues of men's actions. It has not searched the depths of the human heart or known the inner meaning of the phases of life it describes. It is satisfied with shallow emotions, and flaming, soon-quenched passions; and its laughter is light and frivolous. How can a youth know the depths of life, and the dark, sphinx-like problems, that ambush on every side, except by hearsay or echo?

We may safely say that there is no real wisdom, none but second-hand wisdom in any production of a mind that has not suffered and endured through the long years of manhood. Anything that demands only passion and a

sense of beauty or form may be well done by a youthful imagination. But whatever means a wide and penetrative experience of human nature falls futile from the hands of the untried beginner of the journey of life. The youth may be a great lyrical poet, great singer, great orator, even great general where discipline has welded the human nature to be used into a single individual will; but he can never be a creator of a great book that is to pass down through the generations, never be a great artist of work that will touch minds of types divided by race and centuries, never be a great statesman and moulder of a nation. But most of all do imaginative books grow wiser and deeper as years of endurance and labour are added to the author's life. Even humour depends for its depth on the age and the experience; for there is a tone of sympathy or pity or sadness creeps into it with the knowledge of the sorrows of existence that are so all-pervading. The witticisms of youth are shallow and thoughtless and intolerant, seeking the sphere of words or superficial contrasts. All the lasting humour of the past, all that has become great literature has come from men who have lived and loved and suffered through many decades. It is a humour that readily passes into pathos, that has the tremulous note of fear in its voice. And this can come only by sounding the ocean of life's griefs for ourselves and still retaining the joy and buoyancy of existence.

It is of the utmost importance then in studying any book of a great author to know where in his life it has come; whether it is the product of the ambitious and exaggerated passions of youth, or the first harvest of early manhood with its instability and eagerness to find its sphere, or the settled work of riper life that has found its career and follows it with solid footing.

In Thackeray the question is more relevant to understanding his books than with almost any other novelist. For he worked long before finding any proportionate reward. The delight of feeling his labour appreciated came later in life than to most men of genius who bid early for fame. There are some who, like Shakespeare and Milton, George Eliot and Emerson and Hawthorne, are willing to do day-labourer's work in literature and postpone their

masterwork till their powers are in full bloom. Thackeray began as early as Dickens to strike high for popular appreciation; but, unlike Dickens, his work had not popular enough elements in it to make immediate effect; it had too little of the farcical in its humour, and too much ambiguity in its pathos and seriousness to attract the common mind. Even cultivated readers of a book like to be quite sure that they are not being laughed at, that they are taking pathos for pathos and not mistaking its irony. And our novelist had almost a passion for luring the conventional mind by a burst of overdrawn sentiment and conventional morality and gliding into serious matter without lifting any but a little corner of the veil that covered his irony. The power of his satire was either misunderstood or thrust aside as the work of a cynic; and misunderstanding and misappreciation gave a certain bitterness to his irony; he took delight in provoking the great British reading public; he had no mercy for its favourite affectations and sentiments; wherever he could discover any pharisaism in its tastes or habits or opinions, down he came with the lash. If he had any sympathy with its bitter thoughts and feelings he would veil it in the most irritating way for the pure delight of mystifying that great incarnation of snobbery, English society. And no plan was ever more certain in its effect; it raised all the time-worn and mouldy prejudices of the readers of fiction against him and his novels; the majority passed by on the other side and ignored them because they did not understand them; the critics followed suit, as they ever do, although they had some suspicion of his meaning and his power. There is, therefore, a long twenty years of unrecognised or only half-recognised work in his record. And with such a sensitive nature as he had, this lack of recognition was sure to have a strong reaction on his thought and art. With him, then, it is doubly important in order to understand any novel of his, to see its place in his life.

Although we can find in his first literary attempt, "The Snob," indications of his mission to satirise the wide-spread social affectations and hypocrisies of the English race, there is more of mere imitation and burlesque. Theodore Hook and other men of letters of 1820 to 1830 had given a farcical tone to the humour of the day; and even the

humourous drawings had this method of superficial exaggeration. Thackeray had ambitions both as a draughtsman and as a writer; and the character that adhered to his drawings all through his life marked most of his early writings. He sacrificed everything to exaggeration and absurdity of effect; he emphasised the manner or feature or peculiarity of gait so much that his figures were out of drawing and look like dwarfs, giants, hogsheads or eccentricities of nature. He seemed to see life in a concave or convex or fantastically twisted mirror. It was the same with his first pen sketches. He seemed as if he were about to be a mere literary caricaturist, like the American jesters of our day. His duties as newspaper correspondent in Paris drew him out of his tendency for a short time; for he had to report on the events of the day, give descriptions of pictures, and generally make the contemporary life of Paris vivid to English readers. And several stories imitated or drawn from French writers show him in a creative mood he never showed afterwards — the lover and inventor of humourous fantasy. But as soon as he became a magazine writer we have evidence of the strong influence of the English burlesque writers over his genius. His first contribution to Fraser's Magazine when he was twenty-seven years of age was *The Yellow-plush Correspondence*. One of the elements of humour in it is the mis-spelling, that has been so cheapened in our day, and is at its best a poor trick. Even the inner humourous attitude, though it shows his satirical bent, is somewhat artificial. He pretends to write as a footman who echoes in an absurd way the affectations and scorns and ambitions of the fashionable world. He is thus able to exaggerate and ridicule the innate flunkeyism of English society. But it is a trick too, and soon tires the reader, even though he varies the method from reviews of books to tales, from tales to sketches, and from sketches to letters. Its superficiality soon hardens it into a mannerism; and he abandoned it till he began to contribute to *Punch*, a periodical meant for briefer and more farcical treatment of passing topics.

The stories he told as Yellowplush had to do chiefly with the gambling and parvenu fringe of fashionable life into which vicious and boastful forms of existence are more

readily admitted than into the respectability of the middle class. In them, there is, of course, a strong vein of exaggeration. Indeed, Thackeray, in all his early satire, seems to be turning a telescopic glance, instead of a microscopic, upon the minuter features of life close at hand. In his *Major Gahagan*, his first contribution to the *New Monthly Magazine*, we see for the first time his autobiographical method, and his satire on the Irish. It is the story of a fire-eater told by the braggart himself—a true successor of Baron Munchausen; and the art consists in making the boastful lies disprove themselves by their hugeness. The *Fatal Boots* uses the same telescopic method; only here it is a mean man tells, with exultation or an appeal to our sympathies, the inconceivably mean or mercenary dishonesties of his life. In *Catherine* he professes to return to his pure burlesque method in order to turn the reading public against the romances that made heroes of criminals. He chooses a murderess of the early part of the eighteenth century as his heroine, and in the style of Lord Lytton paints her career from the village inn to the gallows; but he makes it so realistic and repulsive that, if he did not now and again break in on his narrative to laugh at the apostrophes and rhetoric and fine Latin and Greek quotations, we would take it as a masterpiece of the Zola school of realism that is now so popular. He meant it to show how repellent the vicious life of criminal heroes is if rid of its romance. But time has stripped his exaggeration of all its burlesque effect; the realism he uses as a caricature has now become the dominant principle of the art of fiction.

Even in its own day it seems to have failed of its full effect. For he came back to his laughter at the affectations of social life. *Cox's Diary* tells a common story of our commercial age, the sudden rise from poverty to wealth and the social miseries that it entails. The bequest of a large fortune and the attempt to live up to it socially ruins the sincerity, the honesty, and the happiness of the family of the barber Cox: and on the discovery of a mistake in the will, they are delighted to return to their humble sphere again.

The *Bedford Row Conspiracy*, and *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and The Great Hoggarty Diamond* lift the

curtain upon the unreality and fraud of political and commercial life respectively. We rise from reading the former with the feeling that political convictions, however grandly mouthed and vouched, and on whichever side they appear, whether Whig or Tory, are but self-interest and petty ambition or pique, thinly veiled, and that the chief reality in life is peaceful and secluded domestic life. The other leaves upon the mind a suspicion of all great commercial companies that make too great professions of religion and charity, and a sense of the utter selfishness of wealth.

But there came a fragment of a novel between, that gave the first real anticipation of Thackeray's satiric genius. It is the *Shabby Genteel Story* broken off in process of publication by a great sorrow, the sight of his wife's reason dethroned. The shadow begins to fall even on the chapters of this story that he wrote. The satire reveals in a half-humorous, half-pathetic light the ruin of all honesty and truth, nobleness and humanity, that class-distinctions and class-scorn cause in English minds. Mrs. Gann and her daughter by a former husband despise and trample underfoot as a grade beneath them Caroline, the daughter of Gann, the bibulous bankrupt. But the injustice and suffering bring out in the little kitchen Cinderella an innate beauty and truth of character; and this draws down upon her the attentions of a fine gentleman lodger, who by being a parasite of the aristocracy has acquired from them their scorn of the classes beneath them, and their idea that honour or laws of morality or rules of courtesy need not be observed in their intercourse with these. Away from his models and objects of ambition, in hiding from his creditors, he is completely fascinated by her, and for a moment is raised by her truth and sweetness and modesty above the meanness and hypocrisy and shameless pursuits of himself and his aristocratic friends. He elopes with her, marries her, and then sinking back into the mire of fashionable ambitions and morality, deserts her and her child. His only chance of salvation from vice he thus abandons in the love of a pure and devoted nature.

But the woe that had entered into Thackeray's life had as yet thrown but a flitting shadow upon his art. At thirty

life is still too buoyant to be permanently saddened or crushed by a grief however great; nor did he for years realise that this spiritual gulf between the reason of his loved wife and himself was to be for ever. For long he watched her full of hope that the wandering, self-alienated spirit would return to health. The only evidence we have of the blow to his domestic life and happiness in his writings of the following decade is the deepening bitterness of his satire. Amid the laughter he raises in the magazines and *Punch* at the expense of the foibles and affectations of men, we feel, there is a soreness of heart, a disappointment with his share of fame and fortune. He has lost the refining influence of a true wife and has not yet found the loyalty of friends to take its place. There is, then, in the stories and satires of this decade a touch of commonness, if not vulgarity, nay, an approach to coarseness that is far from the true Thackerayan style. It is in the work of these years before his sorrow had ceased to be only a fountain of bitterness, before it had begun to refine and widen his sympathies by its sadness, that we find the chief basis for that charge of cynicism so often brought against him as an author. There is a loudness in his laughter at human nature that at times repels; there is a lack of tenderness or pathos in his satire. The only true occasion in all these years that he touches the reader to tears is in a story of 1843, one of the series called *Men's Wives*; it is *Dennis Haggarty's Wife*, the record of a blundering, faithful Irish heart broken by the heartlessness of a wife and mother-in-law. The *Ravenswing*, another of the series, tells of the loyalty of a wife to a vicious and cruel husband; but the burlesque element of the story stifles the pathos. Doubtless the first sense of pain from his great loss threw the pettinesses of life into shadow and made him incapable of sympathy with its sorrows.

But the majority of his writings during this period are mere description of travel, like his *Irish Sketch Book* and his *Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*, or burlesque and farcical, like most of his contributions to *Punch* and his *Christmas Books*, or unsympathetically satirical, like his *Fitzboodle Papers*, his *Barry Lyndon*, his *Snob Papers*, his *Vanity Fair* and his *Pendennis*. In his travels he shows

himself more commonplace, less Thackerayan than in any other of his books. He was not an observer of scenery, he had no deep interest in the romance of the past, and it would have been a breach of courtesy to introduce into a book of fact his satirical observation of human nature that was his special talent. As a contributor to *Punch*, which was meant to amuse the million, he had to become the merryandrew, as far as his insight into human nature and scorn of the vulgar would permit him. In his Christmas Books, his *Legend of the Rhine*, *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*, *Our Street*, *Doctor Birch* and his *Young Friends*, *Rebecca* and *Rowena*, and the *Kickleburys on the Rhine*, he has to play the same rôle of entertainer of an audience that is ready, not to think, but to laugh; with something of the moralist and preacher and satirist, he is more of the caricaturist. So he is in his *Jeames's Diary*, *Bow Street Ballads*, *Travels of our Fat Contributor*, burlesque novels, *Mr. Brown's Letters*, and other contributions to *Punch*; exaggeration predominates over the art, laughter over the moral.

But towards the end of his career on the staff of this comic journal, the truer Thackeray began to reappear; he threw off the motley of the jester and became the satirical anatomist of society. His series of *Snob Papers* is one of the masterpieces of his cynical period. And undoubtedly cynical they are; for they charge all the mankind he knew with the taint of this loathsome disease, every symptom and mark of which he so hates. The city, his English world, was one great hospital of snobs, of men and women sick and corrupt with the vanity and pride of class-distinctions, of the conventional, of the mere trappings and rags of humanity, and with the scorn of the great essentials—human love and loyalty and truth. For snobbery is but the nineteenth century English form of the effect on manners of that aggressive selfishness which all through human history has shown the kinship of man to even the wildest and most ravening of the animals. The method of these papers, the classification of snobs, might of itself tend to the exclusion of the nobleness of mankind. But it suited the bitterness of his genius at this time to exclude it; he went about Diogenes-like with his lamp of

satire to discover a man or woman who was free from petty affectation or hypocrisy or the false standard of life implied in the constitution of society, and he could find none. But not two years had passed over him before he saw the mistake of the cynicism, and when he published the papers in book form he excluded several because, he adds in a note, he found them "Stupid, personal, snobbish in a word."

Yet the self-criticism had not gone far enough even at this time (1848) to destroy the cynic attitude and give him a saddened sympathy with poor humanity. The feeling that he had overdrawn it only made it more effective by making it more self-controlling and artistic. The shallower and more vulgar side of his cynicism had appeared in 1843 in his Fitzboodle Papers, laughing in them, as he did, in a loud and farcical way at the passion of love and the manners of the German nation. Its more vigorous and penetrative form had made in 1844 his *Barry Lyndon* one of his most repulsive masterpieces. It is one sustained effort at irony over the petty villainies of a bohemian and soldier of fortune; the scoundrel tells with boastful pride of his mean and dishonest actions and claims sympathy for the punishment they brought, whilst he lies with the ease of a Munchausen. It is a fine analysis of his own foul character and career by a rogue of last century and reveals Thackeray at the climax of his cynicism.

By the beginning of 1847 he had not lost it; but he had given such full utterance to its more passionate form that he was ready to rein it in. And in *Vanity Fair*, which he wrote during that year and the following, there is a restrained cynical power that makes this, his first long novel, supreme as a satire. It is by far the most ambitious of all his books; for it aims at giving a picture of the whole of social life as far as it is permissibly wicked and virtuously foolish. The name with which he christened it before it was written tells the purpose he had in view. The social world is like the fair described by Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, full of all manner of vanities and evil passions, ruled over by the great prince Beelzebub, who has strayed away from his own kingdom to find even more willing subjects in the votaries of fashion and worldliness. Like *Christian and Faithful*, the satirist wanders among the booths

and along the streets, deafened by the loud cries of pleasure-seekers and pleasure-sellers, loathing and scorning the wild turmoil of ambition and hypocrisy and folly. All the frequenters of the fair are either knaves or fools—that is implied in the very title. Amelia Sedley, who has strayed into it after her lover and husband George Osborne, has her foolish eyes blinded by love to the wickedness of the scene and of him she follows. After her the Faithful of the story, Major Dobbin, is led into it and is laughed at on all sides for his virtue and devotion to this simpleton who sees nothing of his loyalty and nobleness of character. Fifteen years of self-sacrifice for the foolish widow does not remove her thoughts from the false image of her dead husband: it is only one of the wicked dwellers in the fair, the wily Becky, who at last opens her eyes to the falsity of the dead ideal she worshipped. And the curtain is drawn over the fate of the simple, unselfish, and much-laughed-at hero in the matrimonial life he had so striven for.

It was only natural that the dwellers in the fair should make a hubbub against the satirist as they did against Christian, for holding up the mirror to their manners. And the simple and foolish frequenters of it were as angry as the wicked that they should be painted in all their folly. And still more angry were they that some rag of virtue should be left to clothe the nakedness of the wicked; for, unlike Bunyan, he acknowledges in all the followers of Beelzebub, the ruler of English society, some trace of good, in Rawdon Crawley love of his boy, in Becky pity for some of the fools who have been beguiled into the fair, in the Marquis of Steyne a vigorous candour and truth. All the social world of London was in arms against this revolutionist who attacked the first principles of their fair and would overturn it. They called him cynic because he ruthlessly anatomised their hearts. But the cynicism lay not in this, but in his failure to lead his pilgrims, as Bunyan did, out of the fair on their road to the celestial city, to give us a glimpse of that noble life which lay beyond and might in some future age be substituted for the court of Beelzebub.

The same negative method is pursued in his next great novel, *Pendennis*, begun in November 1848 and finished in December 1850. Only in this there is less vigorous

condemnation of the vices and follies of the fair ; Thackeray is now less of a pilgrim and more of an amused spectator. He still continues to preach on his old text with which he closed *Vanity Fair*, "Ah ! Vanitas Vanitatum ! which of us is happy in this world ? which of us has his desire ? or having it is satisfied ?" But there is in the sermon more laughter at the follies than severity against the vices. The wicked and the simple are here less widely separated. He is more lenient towards both. The good are not all fools, nor the vicious all knaves. He does not lash the worldly and their sins with the same knotted whip of sarcasm. He has become partially reconciled to the world for the sake of his hero. It has still mean, vile characters in it like Sir Francis Clavering ; but we do not rise with the same loathing from the sight of its hypocrisies and petty sins. His counterblast against society in *Vanity Fair* has reduced the keenness and vigour of his hostility. And towards the end of the novel, after the illness that interrupted it had brought him to the portal of death, he takes even a gentle view of the failings of human nature, and he gives us a character at last, Doctor Goodenough, who is all goodness, who is in fact the guardian angel of his better characters, without the Puritan severity and intolerance of the good mother Helen Pendennis.

We are quite led to expect a novel that completely rises above cynicism or the purely condemnatory view of life. And we are not disappointed. *Esmond* written in 1851-52 marks the further limit of his cynical period. He was now forty years of age and had thrown off the cruder views of youth that sees the world either all bad or all good. He had lived and suffered and now the sunshine of success was beginning to fall on him. His wife's mental alienation had become a fixed and rooted sorrow in his life. Whilst his own daughters were growing up to be his companions and to soften with their innocencies the asperities of his outlook on existence. And he had been at last to the edge of the grave and looked in and ever after a glance of sadness and soft pity seemed to dwell in his eyes, nor could he view the faults of men henceforth but in the gleam of this tender light. For the other twelve years of his life his satires are mellow with the sunset colour of human pity.

Esmond has satire in it, but the belief in human goodness predominates. The narrator himself is a true hero, filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice. The art profits too; for the characters do not jostle each other on the stage as they do in the two preceding novels.

In the *Newcomes* he returns to his old method, bewildering the reader with the number and variety of his personages; for it is again a novel of contemporary life and he reproduces the multiplicity of London society. But he does not return to the pure and bitter satire of his earlier novels, even though he has full opportunity in picturing the struggle of a new-made family into the ranks of gentility and aristocracy and the failure of a section of it. As in *Esmond* he introduces a true hero, Colonel Newcome; and, like *Esmond*, though with more faults of temper, he is the incarnation of loyalty and modest self-sacrifice. And there group round him characters that have much beauty and nobleness in them with many defects—Clive and Ethel Newcome and J. J. Ridley; even Fred Bayham and Miss Honeyman, James Binnie and Rosie Mackenzie have something genial and attractive about them. And the proportion and degree of hypocrites, snobs and scoundrels are greatly reduced. There is, in short, the light of melting charity over all this work.

For Thackeray now looked through a mist of tears upon the past and saw the path of his forty years marked with the graves of friends and the record of many a struggle. It was thus he turned again to the eighteenth century and in *The Virginians* he drew an attractive picture of the times of the American War of Independence. Though strongly coloured with the irony of the satirist, the noble and good characters predominate in it; whilst even the wicked and profligate are touched with a pitying hand. His good soldiers grow more just and loving and tolerant, his good youths more impulsively loyal and true, his good women more tender and watchful and self-denying. He has come to feel, now that he is so near the great watershed of life, his fiftieth year, that there is nothing so illumining or sunny in this strange dark world, nothing so worth having, as the unfailing friendship or love of good men and women.

His last great completed novel, *The Adventures of Philip*, written during 1861-62, the last two years of his life, is a sermon on the text of the parable of the Good Samaritan translated into the modern world of English society. He shows how relations and the professionally charitable and religious, the Levites and the priests, pass by on the other side; how even a father as well as a mother-in-law, without loyalty or truth in them, may rob you, and how the weary and foot-sore, wronged themselves and unprompted by relationship, may help you and act the Good Samaritan to you.

His own recurrent illness ever reminded him of the fragility and woe of life; and now that he had reached prosperity himself, he bound up the wounds of many a youth that had fallen amongst thieves. And how could he exclude from his art this nobleness and charity of his life? We have still much satire, with perhaps the least tinge of bitterness, on the thieves that rob the innocent and gentle and poor; but we rise from this novel with a sense of trust in the providence that works through the silent and unobtrusive love of friends for our good. With all its blunders and even wickedness, life is a beautiful thing. Cheered by this growing belief in the loyalty and love of human nature, he bids farewell to life. For it is still loyalty and love that make the atmosphere of Denis Duval, his story whose thread was severed by the finger of death.

Thus his own inherent goodness of heart broke the gloomy spell of satire. Much reason had he in the constitution of human society and most of all in that of English society to remain cynic and satirist to the last. There was wealth of theme for bitter laughter in the social insincerities that seem to be the very framework of civilized intercourse. Who, with a heart for humour such as he had, with his sense of standing apart and seeing through life, could refrain from laughter as he looked on the absurd airs of superiority that this little creature called man puts on to his neighbours? Do we not laugh when we see children adopt the condescensions and patronage, the pride and scorn of their elders? Do we not laugh with an amused contempt when we read of Swift's pigmies with their social distinctions and ranks and titles, their petty social

persecutions and feuds, their intolerance and haughtiness? And we have only to stand off a little from the social struggles and rules of any locality to see how ridiculous they are, how like they are to those of Lilliput, what a caricature they are of all that human nature should be, and might be too. It was thus that Thackeray never ceased to see men — spiteful, ridiculously scornful and proud, laughably vain of their social position, cruelly ambitious and stingingly selfish, caricatures of themselves. Who would not laugh at the little beings crawling on the earth and so proud of their crawling a little higher than their neighbours? Who does not grow bitter as he sees them sting and wound and scorn and slander each other? The comedy of this petty existence has never ceased to stir the amused wonder of those who see it against the countless systems that fill infinite space and time. And it passes into farce when they look at the gradings and posturings, the lofty scorn and condescensions, the elaborate hypocrisies and passionate ambitions of the little ant-hill of society. What could Thackeray be but satirist as he gazed down on this burlesque of divine life? What could he be but cynic as he thought of the "little, little grave" and the deep oblivion that awaited each ambition and fame won by such cruel lacerations of the human heart, as he saw the brief vanities for which men struggle and trample each other under foot? His long gaze into the stinging ant-nest called society was enough to turn his thoughts to gall, his laughter into cynic irony. Perchance the mirror held up to the little beings would make them cease their posturing and stinging, would rid them of their farcical pride and scorn of each other.

For twenty years he worked at the task; for twenty years he preached the littleness of their ambitions, the futility of their mutual lacerations of heart, the ephemeral buzzings and poisonings of their insect-like social life. And he found his satire as vain as human existence itself. The world was as frivolous and false and cruel at forty as when he started in high hope at twenty-one. He felt the palsy of despair creep over his imagination. And then death, that grim and silent cynic, brought him weak and faltering to the lip of the tomb: and as he lay, with faint and ebbing light, peering into the darkness that obscures the pages

of the ghastly mortuary satire on human life, he heard the sweet echo of loving human voices behind him, and felt the sweet support of pitying human hands drawing him back from the awful vision; through the mist of farewell that veiled the world behind him, he saw it stripped of all its pettiness, its harsher features softened, its malice and falsity dimmed. Existence seemed beautiful beneath that evening light and in the shadow of everlasting oblivion.

And back he came into life with a wistful, saddened look in his eyes. The past seemed to him as a dream, full of "the still sad music of humanity," that ever-shrilling prophecy of coming winter and eternal night. He knew now that life was more than the theme of satire, was worthier than the sneer of the cynic. He knew that, with all its meanness and hypocrisy, it had nobler elements in it, and not the lash of satire would give these the dominance. He knew that compassion searched deeper into the heart and built higher towards heaven, that love and sweet charity alone could heal the wounds that human crime and error make. Within this evanescent life what end did fame or position or success serve, with fate ever ready to lay his hand upon the beating of the heart? In so brief a space as we live upon this earth what was there of good or nobleness or enjoyment that love could not give? And never after did he cease to find heroism and loyalty and hope in human existence. For, ever and anon, death came behind him and whispered in his ear the irony of the grave; and, like Dante, he had the look as of one who had seen the other world. His satire grew gentler as he neared the final vanishing with his grim guide. Sweet pathos mingled with his laughter at the faults of men. He had found almost too late the secret of life, that there is no gift bestowed by heaven upon mortals like love and friendship and loyalty.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF "ESMOND."

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OUR age has forced the limits of our ignorance back in such a striking way that we seem on the verge of knowing all. When we look back and think of what our ancestors knew, they seem to sit in a narrow cave and watch but the shadows thrown dimly on the wall. We stand under the sky and name the worlds that whirl through space and all but see their history and state. Whilst the past of man and of his little dwelling-place begins to be an open book whose pages even a child may turn. Dark and fantastic was the curtain that hid it in the past and hid all but the narrow environments of each individual and his "little, little grave;" and on it fancy painted rude and grotesque shapes that seemed to people the darkness.

But now it is rent in twain and drawn aside and we know the unsubstantial nature of those dreams that gave it the appearance of knowledge. Doubtless that which we count science, the final truth of things now, will be found by some far-off race of our descendants to be again but a painted veil obscuring the face of nature, fit only to be lifted or torn in shreds by the irreverent hand of some new scepticism. We are still but children playing in the dark, whilst mighty forces are working and titanic dramas are proceeding around us unseen. We feel them obscurely for a moment when some comrade is drawn into them and vanishes for ever, and more vividly when in the shape of plague or famine or some appalling cataclysm they paralyse the race. But our senses are too dull and short-lived to penetrate the veil that hides their motions just beyond our ken. Perchance in ages to come our knowledge will seem to our posterity what that of the animals seems to us.

It is this ever-shifting limit of darkness that is the sphere of philosophy. Without it philosophy would disappear, there would be no problems of life to solve; as long as man

is short of omniscience, he will never be free of that speculation which seeks temporary solutions. For philosophy is the imaginative pioneer of science, trying by wide generalisations or tentative hypotheses to classify or solve phenomena and problems that are not ready for solution. It is the discoverer that finds its way into the unknown and it rudely maps out the country that science will afterwards master. Science can work over only small tracts of knowledge at a time ; philosophy takes within its scope vast domains of the unknown by means of the known. Its speculative formulæ oftentimes embrace all that man's thought can stretch over.

But there are narrower spaces as well for philosophy, and less difficult tasks. Only the front rank of minds can master the whole domain of contemporary knowledge or even know its limits. Others are groping within the little darkneses of their own lives with perhaps a vista here and there down which shines the newer light of science. But on all the other gloom that environs them their thoughts are ever working in attempts to formulate the shapes that meet their narrower vision. There are few thoughtful men but speculate upon the qualities that make up the characters of themselves and their neighbours and the circumstances that have gone to mould them ; few but try to generalise on the careers they have watched and to find some keyword or maxim that will open their secrets. Most men desire some moral formula that will express their thoughts upon the conduct of the men they know, some ethic standard to apply to all the new acts that come before them. Hence the growth of proverbs in every nation, the skirmishers of philosophy, the speculative dogmas that attempt to solve for a time the mysteries of conduct, of fortune, of life. They are all efforts of the human mind to find reasons and general formulæ that will apply to a wide range of circumstances and in this respect they are philosophy. Mistaken they may be, half-truths they generally are ; but so too is philosophy proper but the inaccurate generaliser ahead of facts and science.

It is then no misuse of terms to speak of the philosophy of "Esmond." For even Thackeray, who ever prefers to

think in the concrete, could not refrain from wide generalisations on life. Indeed at the basis of all true satire there lies philosophy; for the satirist, if he rises above mere buffoonery, is the moralist too. He has, if he is more than merely negative, an ideal for background against which he throws his views of the real. His condemnation, implied in all his work, itself implies a mission as one who has thought on life and wishes to attack its evils.

But Thackeray in "Esmond" is studying an age that is past and cannot condemn it with such passionate satire as he does his own age. None the less has he an ideal with which he compares it. He has thought over what history should be and girds at its imperfections, and at the false pictures it leaves on the minds of posterity. He finds it the recorder of pretence and show, the poor parasite of kings. Its portraits of them are like Louis the Fourteenth, bewigged and bedaubed and befurbelowed for state; the reality behind it never sees, the Louis the Great stripped of his finery, a poor shrivelled, hairless, pockmarked little being ready to step into the grave. "I would have history familiar rather than heroic," he says; Fielding and Hogarth are historians and not the court gazette. "Blasphemy claims Olympus for such a wine-drabbled divinity as" common History.

Nor does he leave us in the dark as to the pictures that the historian might draw. His most trenchant satire lies here in the bathos of the poor reality brought into contrast with the painted grandeur. He knows that it all lies in the point of view; "change it and the greatest nation looks mean as we turn the perspective glass and a giant appears a pigmy." Yet he scarcely needs to turn the small end on the Stuarts, they were so shameless in the exhibition of their moral deshabelle. They were the kings of Lilliput, their courtiers and agents malicious dwarfs that intrigued and stung and laid their poisoned snares for their magnanimous foe King William. Petty and crawling natures have to make up for their feebleness by guile and violence. It is thus that nature gives her poisons to the most sinewless and unweaponed of animals, the insects and the serpents. Malicious weapons ever imply a weak and unjust cause or weak and unjust natures. What the Stuarts called levying

war was but the foul instigation of murder. "Their affairs," he says, "being in the hands of priests and women, were conducted as priests and women will conduct them, artfully, cruelly, feebly and to a certain bad issue." The story of the Jesuits, he thinks, is as wholesome as ever was writ; "the artfullest, the wisest, the most toilsome and dexterous plot-builders in the world—there always comes a day when the roused public indignation kicks their flimsy edifice down and sends its cowardly enemies a-flying;" "the conspiracy succeeds very well and everything presages the satisfactory overthrow of the great victim, until one day Gulliver rouses himself, shakes off the little vermin of an enemy and walks away unmolested."

But the saddest thing of all was that these worthless, thankless exiles with their mosquito crew of intriguers around them should have attracted such noble loyalty from the innocent and true who knew them not. "If ever men had fidelity it was the Stuarts; if ever men squandered opportunity 'twas they; and of all the enemies they had they themselves were the most fatal." Debauched, drunken, thriftless, ingrate, "in their behalf so much valour, so much fidelity, so much blood were desperately and bootlessly expended." When one of the most virtuous and loyal of followers, Henry Esmond, goes to arrange for their return, he finds the prince drunk, at cards, and with his mistress; "he cared more for three honours than for three kingdoms;" devout he was and repentant of his peccadilloes; but "his devotion which was quite real kept him from no sin he had a mind to." Misfortune had made him not humble; and gallant heads were falling on the scaffold and gallant hearts exiled from home and reduced to poverty for him, whilst "the heedless ingrate was tippling with his seraglio of mistresses" in France. "'Tis for mortals such as these that nations suffer, that parties struggle, that warriors fight and bleed." Kings are no better in lineage, breeding, or wisdom than subjects. And the heroes of history and romance are commonplace or vicious when their lives are closely inspected. They have no pity for the thousands that suffer to dye heir banners with crimson glory. History, the parasite, has no word for the slain and wounded and bereft: it leaves out the "scenes so brutal,

mean and degrading that yet form by far the greater part of the drama of war." Marlborough, the greatest hero of the time, is brought close under the microscope ; and his greatness seems to fade into a spot of blood upon the page of history. He "was no more moved by the game of war than that of billiards." No love, no pity, no conscience dwelt in the breast of this consummate tactician. This general, like the Stuarts when they sat on the English throne, "sold his country and took bribes of the French king."

We wonder what purpose in the growth of mankind all this expenditure of fidelity and noble valour and blood and happiness for such ignoble objects can subserve. But we turn to Thackeray's book and we see the effect upon the characters. Those who become tainted by the corrupt centre of the cause soon sink futile into a dishonoured grave. But the noble characters are made nobler by the loyalty and self-discipline ; the wreck of their worship does not destroy their faith in man, but only chastens and confirms their love for those who are true and faithful. They feel that the highest and severest martyrdom is not death for that which is good, but life for it ; as Steele is made to say :—" 'Tis not the dying for a faith that's so hard, Master Harry, every man of every nation has done that, 'tis the living up to it that is difficult, as I know to my cost." Not the great company of martyrs and saints that have died at the stake or on the scaffold, will save the world ; but the myriad who live in hourly fortitude, braving the sneer and shrug of a scornful world for their beliefs. For they it is who gain self-discipline and growth of loyalty from the long pain and hand them on as instincts to the generations to come. Death is a chastener, it is true ; "in his presence a women's coquetry is scared, and her jealousy will hardly pass the boundaries of that grim kingdom." But the effect is transitory, and the wicked return to their troubling again and the weary to their despair. It is the silent habit of a life that through children or friends changes the heart of man.

And alas, how undisciplined is humanity, how far from the ideal goal ! It is with "a kind of awe and reverence" that Thackeray would speculate on the bathos of so many careers, "noble promise" ending in meanness and pollution. And success is as little to his taste ; he will not take off his

hat and huzzah to it in its gilt coach ; it is but circumstances that have made the difference between the Lord Mayor and poor Jack of Newgate. One turn of fortune's dice and the Lord Mayor would have gone to the gallows and Jack in the gilt coach. And yet fortune, good or ill, does not really change the natures ; it only develops what is dormant in them ; "as there are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up the pen to write, so the heart is a secret even to him who has it in his own breast ;" "no man knows his strength or his weakness till occasion prove them." It is this latency of men's natures that makes the spectacle of life so surprising, its conduct so incalculable. And through a man's existence oftentimes breaks a tornado that comes he knows not whence and dashes it into wreckage. And yet there are signs and warnings ; "when everything yet seems calm we are aware that the storm is coming." But the omen is vain ; for our humanity is too weak to ward off the crisis. And in a few hours or days we live a lifetime. The marks of the conflict never pass from our natures ; memory retains the anguish till the heart ceases to beat.

But the most woeful of all these tragedies occur in secret by the hearth, and only the eye of love can discover them. For when "there is discord at the centre, the whole household becomes hypocritical and each lies to his neighbour." The dread secret is huddled out of sight. Nothing so deeply impresses Thackeray at this time as these so frequent ship-wrecks of domestic life. Over the book is scattered the whole natural history of such tragedies ; "a pair of bright eyes with a dozen glances suffice to subdue a man : " "what is the fond love of dearest friends compared to this treasure ?" Even against fine judgment and strong will this foolish passion pits itself in confidence. Esmond knows that Beatrix is a mere wicked enchantress, a Circe, and would make him miserable as a wife ; he knows the result would be even more tragic than that he has watched in her mother's household ; yet he cannot throw off the fascination, not though she bluntly anatomizes the passion for him. The very earnestness of his love for her is what secures its failure ; "a woman of my spirit is to be won by gallantry and not by sighs and rueful faces" ; "all the time you are worshipping

and singing hymns to me I know very well that I am no goddess and grow weary of the incense." "So would you have been weary of the goddess too—when she was called Mrs. Esmond"; "a goddess in a mob cap, who has to make her husband's gruel, ceases to be divine." "I won't worship you and you'll never be happy except with a woman who will." Marriage with him would have been another Desdemona affair; "you would, you little black-eyed Othello." That was plain speaking and it was truth too; yet all it does is to deepen the passion, so tragic-hearted is the manhood of love. Not that he had not loved before; the rosy cheeks of poor Nancy Sievewright had touched his boyish emotions: but "these first passions of men and women are mostly abortive." It was the second, his manhood's love, degrading and futile though it was, that left deep marks on his nature. "There is some particular prize we all of us value and that every man of spirit will venture his life for;" and "is he the only man who has set his life against a stake that may not be worth winning?" And all advice is useless; "a man gets his own experience about woman and will take nobody's hearsay." "'Tis I that am in love with my mistress, not my old grandmother who counsels me"; "I that have fixed the value of the thing I would have, and know the price I would pay for it."

And what a price both men and women do pay for it at times! Esmond had watched the tragedy of the payment go on in the house he loved. He saw the love die out of the eyes of his patron, as they rested on the face the bloom of whose beauty the loathsome disease had brushed off; for beauty he married her; and he considered the contract at an end when that was gone; and no priest, no oath, no ceremony could remake it. For the ideal element had fallen from it; all the romance had vanished; there was nothing left to raise the coarse, brainless, easy nature of Francis, Earl of Castlewood above itself. He grew weary of the virtue and devotion of his wife; she was loving and jealous and exacting; he wearied of the jealousy and broke the bonds; then followed complaints, repentances and silent upbraidings. And at last came the irremediable stage. The devotee was disillusioned; the "god of the honeymoon was a god no more"; the shrine was empty, the magic spell

gone ; she saw him as he was, coarse, unfaithful, often brutal, repeating his rude stories and jests with the regularity of a machine, vain and cozened through his vanity by elementary fraud and flattery. He grew enraged that the scales had fallen from his slave's eyes, that she saw him to be her inferior. Married life thereafter was but a hideous farce. "Loved ! Who is to love what is base and unlovely ? Respect ! Who is to respect what is gross and sensual ?" She stood off gloomy and sullen ; he sat swearing and drinking or disappeared into vile haunts. The lamps of love were out and all was funereal and sad ; "the dream of love was over as everything else is over in life, as flowers and fury and griefs and pleasures are over."

A melancholy falls upon the spirit of Esmond as he thinks of these incurable griefs. He comes like Thackeray to weary of life itself. The poor and often beneficent dissembling of women and their jealousy, which are made so much of by Beatrix here, sink into insignificance before the overwhelming pessimism ; the over-weening vanity of men and the deep wounds its humiliation inflicts are forgotten in the darkness that overhangs life. Misinterpretation and injustice seem to run through its whole web. It is hardest of all to bear attribution of bad motives when we mean the best ; these are Thackeray's own pessimistic moods ; "when you are sacrificing yourself for others, then the world and those others are most apt to misinterpret your action cruelly" ; and "But 'tis so in the world ; those get the prize that don't deserve or care for it." We are almost inclined to take that cry which Beatrix utters of her sex as his of all mankind ; "We are all hypocrites ; we are all alone, alone, alone." Little wonder that he feels no repulsion towards death, but only pathos. He never loses consciousness of its dark strand ever twisting through the thread of life. There is a loving tenderness about all his references to the grim visitor. How beautiful and sad are the reflections over the death of the blacksmith's daughter ! "Poor Nancy ! Her cheeks had shared the fate of roses and were withered now" ; "Esmond would have liked to kiss her in her shroud" ; "but she rested many a foot below the ground." It is the living deaths that make him shudder most, the death of love, of enthusiasm, of bright illusion, of all that makes life happy, long before the coffin lid is over us.

It needs a strong heart to bear these recurrent blows without a murmur. Man must even accept the world as it is and try to suffer with silent fortitude the pangs that agonize his spirit. "There is no fortune that a philosopher cannot endure." It is the lesson of life that manhood should finally teach—to await sorrow and disappointment and misfortune with an even mind, to see that success and adversity are alike to the philosophic soul in their effects. Sooner or later the life that is to be at peace must learn that the spirit is above all circumstance. Esmond was almost gay when he knew finally that Beatrix was quite beyond him, being engaged to the Duke of Hamilton. "From the loss of a tooth to that of a mistress there is no pang that is not bearable;" "we make up our mind to the misfortune when it is irremediable." For the wise man before he has gone through manhood has come to see that the sorest pang, what seems at the time to be the hardest stroke of fate, turns out our best fortune. Our reverses are often our best blessings in disguise. What Esmond thought his undoing, his rejection by Beatrix, became his true happiness; "on his knees before heaven rather was he thankful for what then he deemed his misfortune."

By far the greatest trials of our life are our unbounded successes. Few can avoid the intoxication of soul that follows them, the tendency to deal with our friends and their sorrows in a hard merciless way, the loss of balance of mind that ensures subsequent failure, as Thackeray says: "if 'tis hard for a man to bear his own good luck, 'tis harder still for his friends to bear it for him; and but few of them ordinarily stand that trial; whereas one of the precious uses of adversity is that it is a great reconciler"; "the rivalry stops when the competitor tumbles." Success brings the flattery of parasites or the jealousy of rivals. Reverses test our whole circle; they soon silence the snarl of envy and weed out our summer friends. They strip the world of its rose colour and give us truth of vision. And a common misfortune is the true reconciler, whilst common success divides the sharers of it, stirring jealousy and the sense of wrong. For it chastens those who feel it and draws heart to heart. "Our true education begins with our first misfortune." To suffer is to learn; "pathemata, mathemata." It

was the loss of her beauty of face that first began to mould the character of Lady Castlewood to spiritual beauty; it opened her eyes to the inherent sadness of life and the need of constant patience and love; she found the idol she had worshipped but of clay; she rebelled against his unfaithfulness and found herself his superior; but kept silence, "bound as almost all people (save a very happy few) to work all her life alone." She had lived "years of emotion in a few weeks." She had learned "to labour and to wait." Even Beatrix saw how nobly her nature had been forged in the fire of adversity. "Oh, what a saint she is! her goodness frightens me. I am not fit to live with her. She has had a great sorrow in her life and a great secret; and repented of it."

It is the lack of this great moulder of character—sorrow and misfortune—that makes youth so generally shallow, unsympathetic and artificial. Thackeray insists again and again on the conventionality of the young. They have not seen enough of life to be able to walk without the crutches of custom and tradition. Children begin life transparent in their passions as savages. But youth is the devotee of the usual. "'Tis an error," he says, "to talk of the simplicity of youth;" "we get to understand truth better and grow simpler as we grow older." We first grow into the trammels of civilized life and then we have to grow out of them and above them. Most who live in cities remain the slaves of their surroundings and the social rules they have learned. It is only those who have suffered and won self-mastery that rise above the slavery of custom and affectation. Sorrow and anguish are the real universities of character. There we learn to be true to ourselves and to others, to see the truth and to be unashamed to acknowledge it. To lose the world is to gain the true self.

The favoured child of fortune is the slave of caprice. This we can see in the two young Castlewoods, Beatrix and Frank. All went too well with them, they were too fondly cared for by their mother. She "who never said a harsh word to her children must have been too fond and pressing with the maternal authority; for her son and her daughter both revolted early." They plunged into the excitements and pleasures of the world and soon were wrecked; "no

training is so useful for children as the company of their betters, in whose society they lose the over-weening sense of their own importance." A difficult childhood and youth might have saved them from the taint in their blood.

We see the other side of this truth when we look into the life of Henry Esmond. His neglected and sorrowful childhood gave him in youth wisdom that seldom comes till late manhood—the wisdom of pity and tenderness and sympathy with the afflicted. He became solitary, it is true, and looked often sadly on life in his earlier years; but the experience taught him as nothing else could that "the world deals good-naturedly with good-natured people." As Steele says; "a grief touches the young but lightly," and it is only on a serious nature like Esmond's that even a great suffering engraves itself deeply. He "thought of his early time as a noviciate and of this last trial as an initiation before entering into life—as our young Indians undergo tortures silently before they pass to the rank of warriors in the tribe;" and yet "wounds heal rapidly in the heart of two-and-twenty," even when the heart is as easily depressed as his. When he entered on his new duties as a soldier, he felt a new era of life dawn for him and "was almost mortified at finding himself so cheerful."

But it was not one trial that ripened his wisdom; it was the continuance of trials through all his youth and early manhood. And he came at last to estimate things at their true value, to see that love is beyond all other gifts; "not in vain, not in vain has he lived—that has such a treasure given him" as the love of a true woman; "To be rich, to be famous? what do these profit a year hence when other names sound louder than yours, when you lie hidden away under the ground along with idle titles engraved on your coffin? But only true love lives after you—follows your memory with secret blessing—or precedes you and intercedes for you. Non omnis moriar—if dying I yet live in a tender heart or two." "He knows not life who knows not such love;" "to have it is the one blessing in comparison with which all earthly joy is of no value; and to think of his loving wife is to praise God."

And yet there is a greater gift in life, and that is to love, to be willing to do and suffer all for others. It is "twice

blest." The great self-sacrifice which Esmond makes for his lady and her children raises his nature almost above common humanity ; it disciplines his character into beauty. Nothing in life thereafter can enslave him ; he is the master of himself. No sorrow or joy, no success or adversity can overwhelm him in life. It is this that makes good women so calm and dignified and fearless in presence of misfortune ; for "to be doing good for someone else is the life of most good women." No calamity can ever deprive her of this exuberance of kindness ; she will ever find objects for it. This is the supreme and indestructible happiness ; to find it is beyond all price ; it makes us superior to all the other elements of life, be they good or bad. As Esmond says : "to be able to bestow benefits or happiness on those one loves is sure the greatest blessing conferred upon a man."

Nor was this wisdom a swift-won victory for the novelist. It was with different views of life that he began his career. He thought the world would never listen but to irony and laughter. He thought it never could be mastered but by satire. "Motley's the only wear." And motley he donned in spirit and shook his bauble in the face of all mankind. He thought the shallow thoughts of youth that jest was the supreme faculty of man, that the only thing better than to laugh was to stir laughter. The jester seemed to float above the misfortune and gloom of life, untouched by the sorrows that make existence bitter and tearful. He seemed to have the ear of the world (a long ear too, like Bottom's) and to move through it the destinies of the spirit. To laughter as to the fountain of life came trooping the souls of men to drink its drink, its elixir that seemed to give eternal youth. There was nothing like mirth, and the solemn face of the sage or puritan seemed to be a blot on nature, a reminder of death and oblivion. If only he could make men laugh, he would drive their evil and sad humours forth, would cure them of all vile thoughts and ways and win immortal fame. A glorified buffoon who can jingle his bells and never fail to make men laugh with him is the supreme artist of youth ; he knows the secrets of life and can mould its tissue to whatever purpose he will ; the ideal jester stands on the pedestal of the ages.

But the shadows soon fall and the storms of life come and beat upon humanity and the poor buffoon seems to stand unheeded, the cracked jingle of his bells a childish treble in the deafening roar, his motley bedraggled and drooping, his jests but a mockery. If only life were all sunshine, and laughter left no bitterness behind, and languor and death were not waiting in ambush for us ! Ah then, would youth be nearest wisdom and to take our fill of merriment would be the rule of existence ; the fool would be the sage and jesting the crown of art. But cloud and winter and tempest fill half our three score years and ten ; and it is grim work to play the farcer in the shadow of the tomb. Before the driving blasts of fate where shall we find a place for motley ? And even under the summer skies of fortune laughter is merciless and cruel and has no thought for the jester or his victim. Who pities the clown when the laugh goes round against him ? And when his jest is over and the laugh is laughed, who thinks of his gloom, poverty, or heart-ache ?

It was this that Thackeray realised when a decade of facetious art had passed—how shelterless and vapid and futile is the profession of jester. Only the mockery went home and not the moral within it. The world remained untouched by all his farcing, unconcerned. He had laughed and mocked and mimicked and men had laughed with him too ; but when the laugh was done the jester was soon forgotten and all he thought he would teach. Down into his spirit sank the acid truth that the echo of laughter is brief and dies ineffective. And he laid aside his cap and bells and took the mien of the moralist. He sharpened his wit to pierce and poisoned its tip with bitter truth and mingled his humour with gall. At least he would slay the ills he laughed at and wound the vicious and false to the heart. His mockery would cease to fall unheeded. His fooling would carry its lesson home. He cared not though "cynic" should be the reply ; it was only a proof of his arrows reaching their mark. He would move the world from its lethargic acceptance of lies, now that laughter had proved vain.

Another decade he wrought at the herculean task, and the world remained as foul as ever, men and women unmoved in their hypocrisy. The sight of its careless falsity and the

feeling of his hopeless mission sickened him almost to death. And there in the grim presence when the voices of those he loved sounded low and soft and their faces were fading away into the distance, he saw the mistakes of his life ; he knew that there was a weapon stronger than laughter, mightier than satire, to rid the human heart of its shifts and subtlety and lies ; it was not the arrows of fate or the poisoned sneers of the cynic or the shafts of satire that would kill the hydra-headed monster of untruth. He heard in the past behind the pathetic notes of love and pity and his heart melted at the thought. Within the shadow of oblivion he came to know that love is nobler than life and stronger than death. He saw the world open to its summer influence and grow purer and truer beneath its smile. He came back from the grave with this hard-won secret in his heart, this basis of all wisdom. No other regenerating power is there in man. 'To seek truth is noble, to be loved is nobler, but to love is noblest of all.

THE HUMOUR AND ART OF
“ESMOND.”



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HUMOUR is one of the irregular elements of life ; it has little or no law to guide its movements. It seems to come and go almost apart from the will of the humourist. Wit has ever the look of premeditation in it ; its method of production is seen on a moment's thought ; it depends on the double use of a word or a custom, or the sharp contrast of bathos. It bears polish and care in execution, and is never free from the marks of self-consciousness. Humour is like the wind ; we know not whence it comes or whither it blows ; and the secret of its laughter-stirring property is not easy to find. Even to the humourist it is an unknown quantity beyond calculation ; he is not always in the mood to be successful in it ; and though he may bring all the elements together that have produced it before, it may fail of its effect ; it is uncertain as lightning ; it may come with frequency at one season of life and vanish during all the rest ; it will bear no shaping and polishing ; it is more like inspiration than wit and defies mere skill and intention.

It seems, then, a contradiction in terms to link humour with art. And yet imagination plays a large part in it, perceiving the incongruity of circumstances that will fit it and moulding the subtle form it takes. Without imagination there could be no humourist. And in all art it is both the essential and the formative principle. This common term shows the affinity of art and humour. And even in such an inflexible art as architecture we see on occasion humour exercised ; on the cathedrals and abbeys of mediæval times the gargoyles or grotesques figures fill the corners and stud the copings. And painting has ever indulged in scenes that might excite laughter.

But it is literature that most among the arts can give expression to humour without interfering with the artistic spirit. It is more flexible, more like the life of which it is a product. And there is one form of it that professes to combine the two elements. Satire sets itself to employ humour as the mimic and corrector of faulty phases of life and yet attempts to keep up the symmetry and unity that are the essentials of art. Comedy, poem, novel, have all been appropriated to it for its purposes, and though it strains the art of these to some extent, it still retains the spirit of it. And there have been forms invented by it that are none of these. Rabelais and Swift and Sterne have given us prose satires that leap clear of all recognised artistic forms and that yet aim at symmetry of form. And Shakespeare showed how through the very heart of the sublimest tragedy a vein of humour may run that even adds to the sublimity. His comedies are moulded by the spirit of art. But his tragedies that admit humour rise to the highest point of Gothic art ; life itself seems to inhere in them, life at its noblest and most tragic. The ancients separated the two elements as incompatible in art ; the Elizabethans found their reconciliation and showed that tragedy and comedy may mingle and mutually gain power. It is the peculiarity of modern humourous art that it need not be divorced from the tragic elements of life ; and thus it has gained enormously in width of field and in depth of purpose and wisdom. Into literary art humour must pass if it is to be the highest literary art.

But in all books of imagination that lay claim to the name of art, the humour must be kept in subordination. The humourist is too irregular in his movements, too fond of darting from purpose to purpose and topic to topic to allow any of the unity of plan and effect that a work of art demands. He surrenders all artistic or moral or philosophical aim to the excitement of laughter. And wherever humour predominates it is apt to degenerate into farce and buffoonery.

Such was the result of Thackeray's more youthful efforts ; the serious purpose, the attack on the hypocrisies of life, fell into shadow ; and the comedy became supreme, passing ever and again into fooling. In his second period he more rarely indulged in mimicry, or, if he did, he laid stress on his

moral or artistic aim. But he preferred in it to become purely satirical. His more elaborate novels pay great attention to art, but still more to satire. His *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* are series of satiric pictures loosely hung together on the story of a life. The unity is to be found in the development and fate of the characters which swarm upon the stage; but that into which he puts his main strength is the satire, the bitter laughter at the affectations and hypocrisies that make up so much of our lives.

Esmond reveals a new attitude to the literary art. The satire is in complete subordination; where it appears, it appears incidentally and not as the main aim. The problem he set before him was how to make a noble character of the Queen Anne age tell his story and give a picture of the time, so as to be in complete keeping with history. The effort to produce life-likeness of language and detail overcame his tendency to satire; and we have the most serious and least crowded novel he ever wrote. It is likewise his finest work of art. No feature of it obtrudes on the main purpose; no character overshadows the hero and narrator in interest or nobleness. There are, therefore, fewer striking features in it than in most of his longer novels; all are so proportioned and subordinated to the unity of it that we have to study it with care in order to see its full meaning and beauty.

It is, therefore, more admired but less read than any other of his works. For the superficial reader shrinks from that which will need more than a passing thought. The story itself, as usual with Thackeray, is not sufficiently interesting to attract him; there is no mystery in it to keep up the suspense to the end. And yet even this is more artistic than usual. There is something of a plot in it, where in all his others he has but a thin thread to string his satiric pictures on. Here we have the secret of Esmond's birth awaiting us and keeping the mind on the alert till the middle of the book; the boy is brought prominently into the early part and we feel his connection with the family is purposely left obscure. Commonly Thackeray would break in and laugh at the reader's love of sensation and tell him the secret from the beginning; he scorns the stale trick of

the novelist. Yet here he condescends to adopt it through half the book at least. The reason is that he is making Esmond tell the story of his own life and any reference to the secret till the narrator finds it out for himself would be unnatural. Nay, the hero's modesty, and tendency to silence and secretiveness, if not the irony which he has in common with his creator, make him keep it back from his audience longer than its revelation by his dying patron.

And in the rest of the novel there is still a problem kept before the mind of the reader to solve. When the secret is told in full we begin to feel an interest in the relations of Beatrix and Harry Esmond; in fact the novelist for the first time permits himself that element which he had banished from all his works in scorn—the love-story; everywhere else the amorous element is generally burlesqued or shown to be a hollow mockery by him. Here at last we seem to have come to a real story of true love; and the general reader settles down with great satisfaction to the latter half of the book; her mind is drawn by the problem kept before her; is the hero to marry the beautiful coquette? or is it to end in tragic failure of his love? We have all the elements of the common tale of love. And this breathless expectation of the general reader is artfully kept up by the failure after failure of her love ventures. As each lover is either rejected or got out of the way, we wait in suspense with Henry Esmond to know the state of her feelings towards him. How is this frivolous jilt to settle down and make a satisfactory wife to this sober hero? Or is she to be a Desdemona to his Othello? It is kept as a problem till almost the last page; and yet there is no vulgar sensation or mystery in it. The story is told with the simple candour of one who has been the main part in it and feels no boastfulness after it all. When we have read the book through and look back, we see the natural approach to the ultimate solution of the problem, slight touches and hints that tell how it is the mother of Beatrix that is to marry Henry Esmond. And yet it comes upon us with surprise. We have been thinking so much of the beautiful daughter as the object of love that we have forgotten the beautiful mother, the elderly widow. Yet it is surprises like this that meet us in life; we calculate on a certain result and watch the

progress of events towards it with the satisfaction of prophets who see into the future, and suddenly some quiet, unseen, unforeseen circumstance wrenches aside what seems the inevitable, the very course of nature. Thackeray is ever illustrating in his novels this victory of the casual and unexpected; it is one of the most important elements in his satire, to follow nature in her laughter at the short sight of man. It constitutes the fundamental irony that runs through this book.

Saints with a halo already around their heads we worship at a distance, but never think of marrying, especially if they are nine years older; and though young love sees only perfection in its object, it has its fleshly origin stamped upon it in its preference for one that in reality has the blemish of human error on it. It is not the beauty of Beatrix alone that attracts the virtuous Harry Esmond; it is her very capriciousness and frivolity, adding as they do piquancy to her attractions; this it is that enslaves his heart whilst it repels his thought. Had she been a goddess or angel, his love would have been without passion, without that excitement which gives it its charm in youth. Hence the success of the coquette—for a time; hence the number of moths that run themselves into her flickering light; and hence it is the course of true or passionate love seldom runs smooth, especially if it ends in marriage; and hence the irony that Thackeray ever employs in dealing with the theme. The chivalrous and inflammable youth Frank ends by marrying one who might almost be his mother and so does the still more chivalrous but sober Harry Esmond; whilst Beatrix with her soaring ambitions and her resistless beauty comes to an inglorious end. In all of them the result strikes us with surprise; and yet when we look back over the story we perceive how but for our own preconceived notions of the fit and proper in love, we should have seen the possibility of it. But it is especially in Harry Esmond's case that we are cheated of our prophetic dues and it is especially in his case that, with common sagacity, we should have been prepared for the result. The novelist leads up to it in the most natural way; the ambition of Beatrix, the gradual self-humiliation of Lady Castlewood and the sober devotion and self-sacrifice of Esmond were terms of a problem that could

be solved only thus. And this is the way Thackeray laughs at his readers, as nature laughs at her interpreters : into the very structure of the story this essential satire enters ; humour and art are here most subtly combined.

And nowhere is the art more finished than in the development of the characters. The hero has for us all the surprises of nature in his career. We know that his loyalty will ever lead him to the right, and yet there are pit-falls on every side for it ; in his boyhood he seems fated to become a Jesuit, the incarnation of all that is untrue and intriguing. Again he is drifting towards the church when he knows that he has no fitness for it and that he must remain "unfaithful to its doctrines and a failure in its duties" ; but on the threshold he turns and becomes a soldier, although the trade of war was so brutal and unjust and full of false aims and conduct. He has not been long in the camp before his insight into the hatefulness of all its practices and the unheroic meanness of even its greatest commanders make him leave it. Another danger for his character lay in his Jacobitism ; for the sake of his love he took it up with active enthusiasm, and all other managers of the Stuart cause had fallen to the level of the debauched exiles ; but the fall of Beatrix and a close view of their evil manners sufficed to turn him forever from this mire of intrigue and corruption. But the greatest temptation of all lay in his passion for the beautiful coquette ; again and again was he drawn by it almost into ambiguous positions ; but his loyalty stood by him ; and when the chance of securing her hand came to him in the declaration of the truth of his birth and claim to the title and estates, he did not hesitate a moment but threw it aside. For he had within him a strong reverence and a latent passion for his pure and good mistress and would not lift a finger that would do her harm. It was this final self-sacrifice and the long suffering it entailed that consummated his character and made him able to endure and be strong.

Lady Castlemoore's character is even a finer work of art. We see it in the furnace of affliction, being moulded to something fit for the hero. She is not left without fault ; her unrelenting jealousy, which has a strain of nobleness in it as well as meanness, agonizes her through life and leads her into her bitterest trials. Step by step we see her pity for Henry

Esmond pass into protective love, then into reverence and gratitude, and at last into passion. It is one of the most delicate pictures of the development of love in modern fiction ; stated baldly the change seems almost unnatural in its harshness ; yet we accept every step as exactly what should occur, so artistically is the growth described. Her disillusionment with regard to her husband is not so rapid as we desire ; and yet its silent reluctance is more natural and woman-like ; whilst his downward career is one of the most tragic pieces of art in the book, so attractive is the picture of the character to begin with, and so rapid the degeneration, so complete the ruin. We know from the first that he has not the moral stamina to resist the vices of the age or to choose renunciation when honour calls for it ; and yet we grieve that he could not have offered his rights to his little page when Father Holt revealed the secret to him. It is a triumph of art to keep our sympathies for this character and yet to uncover so unmercifully his weakness and vice.

But Thackeray's masterpieces of character-drawing are those of the old dowager and Beatrix. They are meant to be contrasted portraits, one of hideous age, the other of beautiful youth, yet both inherently the same. We shudder at the one and everyone seems drawn to the other ; yet if examined closely the same repulsive selfishness and sensuous ambitions guide both. The same elements lie in the natures of both, fully developed to their nemesis in one, rushing heedlessly on in the other to their doom. With what ~~fine art~~ are the dark lines hidden beneath the beauty and piquancy of Beatrix, with what irony are the memories of the beautiful past brought on to the rouged and wrinkled lips of Jezebel ! It is like a death's head on the banqueting-table of life, and over it there stands, still alive and heedless with laughter, its own youth. To those who read between the lines it is an appalling antithesis. And there is in it the deepest humour of which nature is capable, the humour we see in Holbein's Dance of Death and in many of Heine's lyrics, the humour of the charnel-house. We feel in reading as if we stood apart upon an eminence, surveying human life and seeing in the roseate glow of youth its whole future, flecked with gloom and clouds and ending in the grave ;

over the shoulder of this bright coquette we see the skeleton of the grim monster hideously grin; whilst the aged debauchee shrinks from the sight. Behind the canvas, that holds the portrait of the sprightly and beautiful girl, there gleams as through glass the hideous wrinkled face of an aged libertine and through that a fleshless skull. And before it stands a jester who will not let the meaning pass unheeded. The selfish ambition and the capricious falsity of that beautiful face shine through its youthful features and with smiles and laughter almost prophesy its fate. Beatrix has wit, the malicious wit of the Queen Anne age, that delighted in finding the weaknesses and inconsistencies of virtue and strength, in probing into the sores of men, with no intention to cure them, and in wounding to the heart as it smiled. Her bantering of Esmond, especially after she had discovered his secret of passion for her and the still deeper secret which he did not see himself, that of love for her mother, is clever, but ruthless. She is Thackeray's most artistic embodiment of the wicked wit of the age he paints.

But he puts into her mouth deeper irony than her own, an irony she is not conscious of, the irony of nature. When we look back on our past we see how subtly life has made us eat our own words, how we come to do that which we abhorred and scorned and said no power would make us do; fate seems ever leading us by labyrinthine ways to be or do the thing we despise in others, the opposite of our ideals. It is in youth especially that we thus provoke the destinies to reverse our prophecies and manifestoes by the unwise and uncharitable confidence of our criticisms. On the lips of Beatrix we find here this prophetic irony most. Thackeray makes her exclaim wildly and contemptuously against clergymen, although her first matrimonial venture is to be with one;—"Oh these parsons, I hate 'em all"; "they wear a sanctified air in public and expect us to go down on our knees and ask their blessing, and they intrigue and they grovel and they backbite and they slander worse than the worst courtiers and the wickedest old woman"; and this sprightly passionate critic was to become her own hyperbole of loathing "the worst courtier and wickedest old woman" of her age. Nor does he let her close without

making her give a glimpse of the path by which she is to travel to that repulsive goal; "I should like to go to a country where there was not one, or turn Quaker, and get rid of 'em; and I would, only the dress is not becoming, and I've much too pretty a figure to hide it." It is her overpowering vanity that will make her what she hates. So she tells Esmond with pitying scorn that he will go over to the Hanoverians when they come; and it is she who goes over and goes over in the most shameless way. And, as if to make her map out by her hate and contempt her whole future life, he leads her round to the subject of Tom Tusher; "that sneak of a Tusher" she calls him; and "Shall I be Castlewood's upper servant and perhaps marry Tom Tusher?" Yet under this contemptible creature's cassock she is in after years to cover her damaged reputation. It is nature, doubtless, that makes us condemn and attack that in the conduct of others which in ourselves we struggle against as a latent weakness, and the very wildness and intolerance of the contempt reveal the waywardness in us, which, if it meets the favouring circumstance or temptation, means violent reaction against the suppressive effort. And thus nature has her revenges, sometimes humorous, more often tragic.

It is different with the old if they have retained the foolishness of youth; nature has then her jest patent to every laugher. The past with its withered growths has an obtrusive way of clinging to life that the shy future has not. And all pretences concerning it have the lie in them brought face to face with the reality. Herein lies the bathos of the dowager's appearances; she assumes that she is the same as she was when young, standing as she does amid the wreckage of her youth, and the contrast is ludicrous in the extreme; and Thackeray takes full advantage of it for the purpose of humour. She "took a fancy to the young man, her cousin, who was her junior by several years (which circumstance she did not consider to be a fault in him)"; "she had nobody's word but her own for the beauty which she said she once possessed"; "when Esmond went in his new uniform to see her,—'Red' says she, tossing up her old head, 'hath always been the colour worn by the Esmonds,' and so her ladyship wore it in her own cheeks very faithfully to the last." And he takes delight in satirical

references to her portrait as Diana ; "it was painted about the time when royal Endymions were said to find favour with this virgin huntress ; and as goddesses have youth perpetual, this one believed to the day of her death that she never grew older ; and always persisted in supposing the picture was still like her " ; "as the sky grows redder and redder towards sunset, so, in the decline of her years, the cheeks of my Lady Dowager blushed more deeply."

But the contrast goes deeper than the film of paint upon her cheeks ; into her heart the lie has eaten its way ; the bathos belongs to her inmost thoughts. She believes she has all the spirit and nobleness to make a national heroine whilst she is only making herself grotesque. Her references to William of Orange Thackeray ever makes anti-climax ; "Let them consign me to dungeons and strike off my head from this poor little throat (and she clasped it in her long fingers) " ; "let the tyrant of Orange bring his rack and his odious Dutch tortures—the beast, the wretch ! I spit upon him and defy him : " "At first my lady was for dying like Mary Queen of Scots (to whom she fancied she bore a resemblance in beauty) and stroking her scraggy neck said :—' They will find Isabel of Castlewood is equal to her fate ' ". Then comes the actual resistance ; and it is the most amusing scene in the whole book with a touch of repulsiveness ; the heroine rouges her ghastly old wrinkles and puts on a new cap, and propped up in bed she meets the enemy. Her French maid strikes a tragic attitude before a cupboard which Westbury with his soldiers is going to search ; and it is found to contain only wigs, washes, and rouge-pots. The heroism reaches its highest anti-climax when they lift the poor old lady out of her bed and find the treasonous papers stuffed into her pillow. Her life afterwards is quite in keeping with this ludicrous fiasco of her heroism. All her wild tirades and constant intrigues against the tyrant were over-looked by him, whilst she spent her days in filling her wrinkles and bedaubing her cheeks and her nights at cards ; "she cared more for trumps than for most things in life." Her accomplishments and her religion were no better than the perpetual youth and beauty she washed off at night. She despised the English language ; French was the only tongue for a woman of



society. Yet the French she spoke and wrote would have made even a courteous Frenchman laugh. And it was her religion that was worst of all; she kept up the farce of believing in the saintship of that scoundrel and debauchee James the Second and in the power of his bones and relics to work miracles, although she heard constant jests over his libertine life and her coarse relationships to it. It is only on her death-bed that she seems to rise a little above her vicious and mean self, in asserting the rights of Harry Esmond. But even there the farce creeps in; it is because she hates Lady Rachel she confesses; and she mingles with her confession profanities at the expense of William of Orange. Thackeray has no more appalling satire on human nature than this old Jezebel; and the art of it is supreme.

There is equally unsparing humour over the meanness of the Tushers, the father, mother, and son, with their crude and transparent flattery and parasitism, and their unblushing cowardice. Tom junior is handled with especial severity; "he loved a joke if by good fortune he understood it and took his share generously of a bottle if another paid for it and especially if there was a young lord in company to drink it." But the portraits are miniatures and the satirist has not much interest in them.

The most loving of all his satirical studies is that of Dick Steele, who gets his audiences not only to laugh at him but with him; the poor bibulous humourist knows his failings and never scruples to turn the laugh upon them; "'A lovely creature in affliction seems always doubly beautiful to me' says the poor captain who indeed was but too often in a state to see doubly." He sees that Harry has not cut the leaves of his Christian Hero and adds "The sermon is good, believe me, though the preacher's life may not answer it." And Dick has wit too. His encounter with the lawyer is second only to the appearances of Beatrix for sparkle. But he is oftener the theme of laughter than its creator. His Prue rules him "with a rod of pickle"; yet through all her open as well as secret chastisements he keeps his temper with the most hiccuppish good-humour.

A similar sweet-natured satire is that on the young Frank Esmond and his courtship, laying siege, as he did, to a lady

whose heart had suffered all the fortunes of war ; " Dear Frank," says his mother, " how fond he is of his military profession ! He is studying fortification very hard." The gentle humour at his expense is a marked contrast to the savage satire on Marlborough, which is kept up through all the history of military affairs.

It is a pleasure to turn to the quiet satirical picture of Lady Castlewood, with her jealousies and misunderstandings. Here Thackeray's humour becomes very serious as well as sympathetic. He brings the perversities of her love into the presence of death, and how poor and weak they seem ! Hushed are all her upbraidings and suspicions when she goes down with Esmond to console the old smith, the father of Nancy Sievewright ; his surly grief leaves her " silent and shame-faced at the door ". And how deep the sarcasm goes when it deals with her change of front at the death of her husband ! She had gloomed on him in his unfaithfulness ; now he was " good, noble, and trusting " ; death and sorrow had brought a grim hypocrisy into her life ; " the officers told stories of the dead lord's adventures of love or pleasure, whilst my lord's poor widow was sitting at his tomb worshipping him as an actual saint and spotless hero." Thackeray again and again makes death play such antics with the feelings of woman ; makes him the jester at the hypocrisies of human emotion. His humour has thus found its deepest level.

It is the commonest of fallacies to think of humour as only the irritant of laughter ; in popular thought the humourist is the broad buffoon who wears perpetual motley and never ceases to keep his comrades' faces contorted in a grin. Roars of laughter are supposed to follow on every jest or else it is a failure. And so accustomed do audiences and circles grow to the habit of jest in their special buffoon that they laugh before his jest comes, nay, when it is not meant to come at all. He raises his little finger or lets his eyelids fall and they become convulsed. And his case was only a more striking instance who, clowning on the stage, felt the hand of death upon him and only made his hearers laugh the more, the more its agonies found expression. Laughter in its crude and primitive form is the furthest of all spiritual phenomena from intellect or emotion ; it shows

itself almost purely physical in its epidemic character. And it is on this that the professional clown depends for his success; once he has loosed the facial muscles of his audience and set its louder section neighing, he knows the whole of it is at his command; the cruder and coarser his gestures and grimaces grow, the louder the laughter. Nor does this patent jesting carry from circle to circle or from age to age. And it is this that in the literature of the past so loses all its savour that we shudder at the toothless eagerness of the dead jester and wonder where he found his audience.

We never touch the soul of humour till we pass the fount of tears, and hear the echo of the griefs of men wail around it. It needs but the shallowest of spirits to mock the deeds and ways of our fellow-men; it is the easiest of tasks to "set the table on a roar" with mimicry; and, as we watch the buffoon reducing to the level of his laughter a noble or heroic word or act, we seem to see the link that binds the human to the ape; he thinks he is superior to that he laughs at or makes laughter at, when he is only proving the meanness of his origin. There lies the saddest side of vulgar laughter that it can make the mere human parrot feel superior to all that is divine, whilst it is in reality unbarring to all eyes but his own how mean and shallow is the soul of him. It is this mirage-like self-elevation, this conceited and spurious sense of superiority to everything laughed-at that leads youthful vanity so often into mockery and laughter. The shallow young soul, the shallower the better, thinks he has deeply impressed his neighbours, when he has scoffed or made merry over something that has touched their hearts; he passes away swollen with vain conceit. Poor fool! if only he could hear them after he is gone or know their thoughts! If there is one thing that youth should pray heaven for more than another, it is that he may be delivered from this phantom "superiority" that mockery induces; for it makes his whole nature a desert, fit for no good human purpose. At least his friends do ever fervently pray for the youthful believer in his powers as a jester the wisdom to keep his lips closed. For it is not once in ten thousand years that the jaw-bone of a young buffcon finds a Samson to wield it, or meets with a master like Balaam to correct.

The only humour that is worthy of human attention is that which never approaches the faculty of laughter, that which moves the heart more than the diaphragm. None lives but this to touch the soul of after ages or other nations. For within it is the kernel of everlasting thought and everlasting pathos, "the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin." What element remains with us after the farce is played, the buffoonery is over? Nothing but desecration of the shrines of life. But put into the jest the wisdom that comes with sorrow, and the love of good is strengthened, the life grown fuller of meaning. How far into the core of existence seem the sayings of Lear's jester to search! For they come from a heart stung to pathos by the wrongs that thrive in the world. How deep and lasting the humour of Hamlet, who is broken-hearted with the dread and horror that fill his mind! It plays around the dark horizon of life like storm-*preluding* flashes; it deals with the mortality of man and the dim light he has upon the problems of his nature. The great humourists of the world are those that have felt the vanity of human existence till grief itself seemed futility and madness, and irony alone remained for them to use. It is such irony that lives in nature and in history; fate plays with it as it works out its tragedies; and ever and anon we grow conscious that our own destiny is smiling at us; we struggle and slave for years to reach some object we yearn after and when we reach it we laugh to find it but an illusion; we scorn someone for what he seems; we come to know him better and find he is what we have only fancied ourselves to be. It is thus the destinies laugh at us; and still more has nemesis the heart of a jester.

But this is almost a foreign tongue to youth who have not learned even the alphabet of sorrow or despair; and that which they do not understand they think has no existence or no sense. If only Thackeray had held his peace until the bitter schoolmistress experience had taught him how deep life is, he might have left a thousand foolish jests unsaid. Before he wrote his *Esmond* he had passed through the hard school of sorrow: and the veil was not withdrawn for him from the face of nature. And here his humour deepens beyond shallow laughter, or still shallower cynicism. He brings it into the shadow of the grave; and knows how poor

life is, how poor all jesting is, without the consciousness of its sadness. Seldom is he far from the fountain of tears, when he jests now. Thus it is that this book is counted his masterpiece ; it has reached the common springs of weeping and laughter. And none of the great humorous books of the world but have been written after the watershed of manhood has been passed.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
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IT is one of the most difficult of creative tasks to mingle learning and imagination. The learning must have passed into the life and not remain as a dead acquisition. Else it clogs and hampers the creative power. For that which comes only through books and not through experience as well has but a pale and shadowy life in our minds and soon vanishes into the limbo of forgotten things. The only chance of what we learn remaining with us in fertile form is that it take root in our daily thought and feeling, that it unite with the living elements of our souls and become a new element of growth. That which we have truly learned we soon use almost unconsciously as if it were native to ourselves. It mingles with our past not through memory alone but as a part of our experience, as almost native to our minds, with its roots all matted through the life.

Now history, though it is the record of human nature in its throes and self-discovery, has been written too much as the annals of outer events that have no spiritual law or interpretation behind them; fact predominates over thought or the illustration of the development of human faculties and institutions. And facts or formulæ have no living power in themselves to seize on the mind or the experience of life, no principle of growth in them to take root in the spirit. Only where they have flashed a light on the knowledge or experience of our own existence, are they likely to add new energy to our future; only when they waken some echo of the instinctive or self-mastered past, are they likely to resound through the life.

It is one of the most perilous tasks for the dramatist or novelist, then, to venture on some period of the past as the scene of his work. A few weeks or at most months of preparation is all he can give to the recovery of its lost life. Into biographies and histories and encyclopædias he dips and finds so much dead material that nothing but a lifetime of work will put life into it; and the more he reads, the more purely acquisitive he becomes, the more loaded with his spoils. His mind sinks beneath the burden of details and inarticulate facts. He tries to elicit a few formulæ that will gather them together. And the result is the learning flows in a channel separate from the fiction; the antiquarianism and the life are unamalgamated. Tracts of unilluminated and unilluminating description alternate with the dialogue and acts of the imagined characters; or where the two seem to mingle, the atmosphere of fact seems to stifle the imaginative life. Thus Scott has to drain off into a preface or long series of chapters the thicker sediment of his reading about the age he chooses for the scene of his novel; and only in the latter part do we feel the narrative move as if in a living medium.

And the demand on the modern painter of historical manners is more exacting than in older times. For history is more wisely studied by the general reader and more accurately and fully studied by the historian and critic. And the whole world is agog over the mistakes or historical misconceptions of a drama or a novel. However powerful or full of genius it be, its merits are forgotten in the delight of discovering some blunder of fact that may be definitely pointed out. In Shakespeare's time there were few to tell whether his history was right or wrong and still more there was no professional critic whose duty it was to interpret his plays to the public. He was thus left to his full creative impulse, unhampered by the necessity of study or of adapting all his details to the age that was chosen. His audience would rather have a picture of their own times imported into the past. For that was the method of historians up to our own day—to make a vanished age live again simply by breathing the life of their own age into it.

It is our more scholarly and accurate times that have made the task of historical fiction so much more difficult.

The novelist must realise the period he chooses down to its minutest details. He must leave no book on it unstudied to make sure that he will not stumble in the dark. Hence it is that we have so many failures in this type of fiction. So much dead fact must be gathered, so many details must be held firmly before the mind that the energy is spent on this material and the resuscitating imagination is borne down itself.

The historical novels that are truly living and real can be counted on the fingers—a few of Sir Walter Scott's, the *Romola* of George Eliot, and the *Esmond* and *The Virginians* of Thackeray. But there is perhaps none of them that approaches to *Esmond* in the complete distillation of the learning and disappearance of all the antiquarian sediment. We enter on life from the first page; and, though the living personality of the author is reined in and concealed, the living stimulus from it is ever there. The narrator Henry Esmond is no mere reflex of Thackeray, but a real character from the age of Queen Anne.

And the reasons for so vivid a realisation of the past are not far to seek. The novelist had been drawn to this age even from the days of his boyish ambitions. For his school was inspired by traditions of its most famous scholars, Addison and Steele, whose lives rise far above their age in sweetness and tolerance and purity. It was their common product—*The Spectator*—that drew the early talents of Thackeray towards the sphere of social satire in prose. It was their style that gave him the first model for his. And it was their good-humouredly ironical pictures of society that suggested to him the theme of his satire. It was little wonder that he was drawn to the age in which they lived; he seemed to have a natural affinity for it. And though Fielding from later in the century became his ultimate model, he never seemed to lose his sympathy with his two favourite prose writers, and evidently continued to read and study their books in his leisure hours. We see traces of them all through his early efforts. And when he had made his mark as a novelist and found his power over character and social scene grow masterful, he returned to the period that had fascinated his youth. He set himself to study it with more minuteness and to fill in the deficiency in his

knowledge of it. The result was the lectures on the English humourists.

But he was also greatly interested in the military achievements of the time as well as the literary, and he looked into the life of Marlborough and the other soldiers of the period. Yet his new knowledge seemed but a re-awakening of old life; for the age had grown into his own existence almost as a part of it, he had read and admired its literature so long, not Swift's and Pope's books, but the periodicals of Addison and Steele; and new features of it seemed naturally to harmonise with the old. None, therefore, of the elements of *Esmond* seem to be excrescences on the picture of the time, none seem to be drawn from the nineteenth century. All chemically combine and form a new element that is of the stuff of the age of Queen Anne. Had he started only before beginning the novel to study the period, the knowledge of it would not have had time to become informed with imagination; it would have lain as antiquarian facts rudely blocked out and sculptured beside the living elements of his characters and scenes.

We seem to live through the last years of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth. For the action of the novel extends from the Revolution of 1688 to the death of Queen Anne, though we have many vivid backward glances on the times of the Restoration. James the Second never comes upon the scene, and yet we see him so plainly, in all his superstition, poltroonery, infamous morals, and lies. For we have brought before us in the flesh and paint one of the products of his debauched court and manners, the old Jezebel, Isabella, Dowager Countess of Castlewood. Her only virtues are a certain amount of boldness in danger that might almost be taken for courage and a certain protectiveness of Henry Esmond that, if added to truth, might have been called loyalty. We can easily judge from her how poor the rags of virtue that covered the nakedness of the court of James the Second, the tainted natures it left among its adherents in England and the still more tainted natures it took with it to the Continent. False, vain, intriguing, debauched, they were corrupt to the very heart. Only the country Jacobites who had never seen the Stuarts and their courtiers had any

chance of nobleness or truth or purity. It was they who were the only hope of a return; for with their simple chivalry they were capable of lifting the cause out of cowardly intrigue into the region of enthusiasm. The surest course to bring about its failure would be for the Stuarts and their favourites to come into contact with these. For disillusion would follow; the loyal gentry of the country would accept the coarse standard of the exiles or abandon active Jacobitism for ever. It is this development that is told in the novel. A short intercourse with the Pretender destroys the romance of the cause in the Castlewood household, except in the case of the frivolous unprincipled Beatrix who succumbs to the corruption. In the history of one Jacobite family we have the whole explanation of the failure of the Stuart cause, in spite of the uninteresting character and boorishness of the Hanoverians. As a memory or as a distant dream it threw a spell over many a household for more than a century; as a reality, met and faced, it was too gross and foul to leave any but the gross and foul actively loyal to it.

As it was it kept England in constant ferment for half a century. All society was undermined with intrigues and corrupt with the low standard of morals it encouraged. It was the great genius and tact of William of Orange, backed by the self-restraint and common-sense of the old Puritan party, that staved off civil war till it was too late to be real civil war and prevented the hideous dream of a second Stuart tyranny being realised. Yet the assistance the exiles themselves gave to the cause of their enemies is not to be overlooked; the grossness of their morality, the falsity of all their words and even oaths spread universal distrust amongst the doubters and made the favourers and managers of their cause as corrupt and untrustworthy. The weapons of treachery and mean crime, that they used against their enemies, they learned to use against their own ranks. Their followers shifted allegiance again and again, and none could be trusted. The whole political life of England was a mass of perfidy and intrigue and corruption. Even the statesmen and generals were devoid of loyalty and truth to either side; whilst professedly working for the one they intrigued with the other. It was not the Jesuits alone like Father Holt

that undermined society and made every man distrust his neighbour. Men who had been honourable and sincere moved about stealthily like thieves in the night and lived in an atmosphere of guile and lies.

Even those who took no active interest in politics or either side had the whole fabric of their morality shaken ; so frequent were the changes of patrons and friends and employers in every district of the kingdom that allegiance became mere flattery. We can see this in the picture of the Tusher household. Both husband and wife have grown into parasites of Castlewood ready to change or reverse their compliments with every new patron. The worst effect this had was upon the church. Its clergy from changing sides had lost all dignity and sense of principle. Whilst those who had remained constant to the Stuarts and followed them to the Continent had acquired their profligacy and the moral irresponsibility of a vagabond court. Even Dean Atterbury, by far the most eminent and virtuous of the Jacobite episcopal clergy, shows at the close of this novel a looseness of moral principle that is appalling in a representative of Christianity ; he seems to approve of all the wild debauchery of the exiled prince and reasons away with the subtlety of a Jesuit all the moral objections raised against his life. Yet what could be expected of a prelate who took the pay of one monarch and his state church whilst trying to get another in his place who would be ready to destroy that church ? If there is one thing that ruins all nobility of nature and all virtue in a man or nation or age it is treachery ; it is the sin that is never forgiven by nature ; for it turns in upon the soul of the traitor and corrupts it with a never-dying spiritual leprosy. Have you ever done a false or faithless action ? then thank Heaven with your whole heart if the most bitter remorse has burned out its contagion with its biting caustics ; else you are past redemption.

That is the horror of a revolution, be it sanguinary or peaceful, the ceaseless undermining that makes every step unsafe ; it is an ever-flowing fountain of corruption and treachery. Far into the country districts of England, that of 1688, unstained by blood though it was, carried the taint, and ruined the simplicity and trust of rural life. The little

village of Castlewood we see torn by the religious controversies of the time, and the towns around roused to wild fury at the sight of the wicked old Lady Castlewood's carriage with Father Holt in it, and we hear the people crying out "down with Jezebel" and "the bishops for ever." In amongst the villagers the Jesuit finds his way and sows dissension in simple households; whilst their own vicar, Doctor Tusher, has ceased to command their respect. And little wonder; "his business was to flatter and make sermons: and he was doing the one or the other all day"; but as soon as the small-pox appears in the village and the castle, this professed servant of divine love and mercy argues away his duty to his people and disappears till the epidemic is past. Little wonder that the English clergy like him were treated as menials in the houses of the gentry and nobility, being married to the waiting-woman or the cast-off mistress of the host, and being set at table below the salt, like servants, and made to rise after the first course. Little wonder that they were treated with contempt by the priests of the older church, when these latter dealt as equals and friends with their lords, and as courageous patrons of the villagers, never flinching from duty to them in an epidemic. Thackeray tells us in the history of the 'Tushers the whole secret of the low ebb that the English church had reached in last century. It was the refuge of parasites and time-servers, of the unchivalrous and irreligious who failed to find another sphere; and this it remained till the evangelical movement of the close of last century put a new spirit into it. Harry Esmond meant to enter it in order to take the Castlewood living, as he had no fancy for war. But he saw how many youths at Cambridge were entering it in a mercenary spirit, and he turned on the threshold, feeling that "the cassock and bands would have been marks of life-long servitude." For he scorned Tom Tusher as a clumsy boor, who, without dignity or principle, was about to follow in his father's footsteps; and these were by no means always steady; for he saw the vicar go away home from the castle "with rather a reeling gait". And in after-life, when he saw Swift, that imperious and malignant priest, tyrannise over all who cringed before him, and heard of Tom Tusher rising by the disgrace of his wife into a

bishopric, he did not regret his halt on the road to the pulpit. The only bright glimpse we have of the beauty of the Christian religion as seen in the Church of England is the devotion of the young lady Castlewood and her loving labours amongst the poor. But we feel it is almost in spite of the church and the clergy of that time that we have noble characters in this book.

The clergy, in fact, were no better than their age and, in a time when both religion and morality were out at elbows, their representatives were thrust aside and contemned. In such an unjust and vicious time the women suffered the same fate. "It was the fashion," Esmond says, "to speak of women as cheats, jades, jilts," "and there's not a writer of any note with the exception of poor Dick Steele that does not speak of a woman as a slave and scorn and use her as such". And we have a picture of one of the exceptionally pure households of the day—that of Francis, Lord Castlewood. "Few men were so jealous about the point of honour in those days; and gentlemen of good birth and lineage thought a royal blot was an ornament to their family coat." The old lord had saved money off his daughter's disgrace at the court of Charles the Second and his brother, Frank would have nothing to do with such a "fly-blown morsel." Yet he has not long come to Castlewood before he neglects his young wife whom he had married from love. Even when he revered her, he indulged in drinking, profanity, and lewd jests, before her and his children. But the small-pox came and brushed the bloom off her complexion; and with all his kindly nature and chivalry, he ceased to care for her and abandoned himself to the wine-cup and gambling and a coarse actress at Hexton. His wild, unscrupulous, gambling friend, Lord Mohun, a character taken from the history of the time, lives with him and tries his wicked best to draw her from virtue. Her simple innocence sees no evil in his gallant attentions. But her now vicious, debauched husband has his eyes opened and dies on the point of this notorious libertine's sword.

She is, however, an exception; for most of the women of the aristocracy came within the range of the licentious influence of the Stuarts and adapted themselves to it. It is thus that Pope

had the hardihood to write, "And every woman is at heart a rake." Her own daughter Beatrix seemed to drink in dissolute thoughts with the very air she breathed, so little were the court ladies of that day able to resist the gross atmosphere they lived in. And Esmond says; "if the English country ladies were at this time the most modest and pure of any ladies in the world, the English town and court ladies permitted themselves words and behaviour that were neither modest nor pure." They drank with the men at table to the verge of drunkenness, they listened without a protest to the grossest jests and stories not merely on the stage in the presence of men, but in private conversation from the men themselves. They indulged themselves in talk that was not over nice. We hear of such furious combats between the court ladies of the court of James the Second that the peace could be kept only by sending them down to the country. And one pitched battle of tongues between the Duchess of Marlborough and the old dowager Lady Castlewood at Anne's court is described: in it the weapons are the grossest insults and insinuations. It is but the English court Swift is painting when he makes Gulliver describe the disgusting and indecent habits of the grand ladies of the court of Brobdignag.

There does not seem to be a touch of exaggeration in it except the gigantic size of the bodies. For we have only to look into the favourite reading of the old dowager—Shadwell and Wycherley, Etheredge and Sedley—to see the foul ideas and jests they dabbled in. Boxes of the last wicked plays were regularly sent down to Castlewood and the one symptom of shame was that little Harry Esmond was whipped if he looked into them. And with this fondness for spiritual filth went the greatest devotion to the forms of Christianity. But a devotion that springs from mere fear of the priest and his threats of future punishment is not far from superstition. And hence we find the old dowager believing that all the diseases from his wicked parents would be driven out of her scrofulous child by the touch of James the Second whom she knew to be a hypocrite and debauchee. Nor when the poor little sufferer for his parents' sins died did she give up the belief in spite of the cruel and coarse jests of his courtiers. Nay,

when her old royal lover died, she believed in the miracles wrought at his tomb or by his relics. As a rule in most ages it is the good that are believed by the superstitious to become saints and work marvellous cures by their intercession or by the touch of their fleshly remains. But in this age morality had become completely detached from saintship. The greatest scoundrel and debauchee might command the religious worship of the women of the time in the midst of the jests at his gross and immoral life. Nay, the most terrible thing was that the good and pure and still innocent were dragged by the necessities and loyalties of the Stuart cause to bow the knee to corruption. After the bedroom in young Lady Castlewood's house had been prepared for the royal and debauched exile, "Beatrix", still pure in life, "knelt down and kissed the linen sheets", "and her mother made a curtsy at the door as she would have done to the altar on entering a church and owned that she considered the chamber in a manner sacred."

The source of this gross superstition was the ignorance in which women were now led to believe lay their true interests. The old culture and devotion to learning that marked the Elizabethan court ladies were gone, and in their place had come scorn of anything that might train the intellect or imagination. Lady Castlewood concealed her new accomplishments in Latin, French and Italian from her lord; for "he pish'd and psha'd at the notion of learned ladies and would have been angry that his wife could construe out of a Latin book of which he could scarce understand two words." 'This was the real secret; the men of the court had become boors, scarcely able to write their own names. French was the only language they had any respect for and that they knew worse than English if we are to judge by the letters of the old dowager in that language. Education was confined to a small circle of literary men. By all others it was despised.

And the men could not bear to have those whom they considered the mere slaves of their pleasures better educated than themselves. Else the tables would have been turned on them, and those whom they contemned would have contemned them. It is true they sometimes addressed the women they hunted in high-flown terms, "Divine Gloriana."

But the terms were as much a mockery as their morals. Lord Mohun is one of the finest specimens of the gallants of the day, full of hollow compliments and courtesy, at heart rakish, dishonest, murderous. The whole of Stuart society was constituted to fit the voluptuous dandy; one quarter of the day was spent in cards, another quarter in drinking; the rest was devoted to gallantry or scandal. His only approaches to virtue were the magnificently stoical air with which he bore his gambling losses and the point of honour which used the duel as its weapon of revenge. He led up to the quarrel and prepared to fulfil the challenge with the same business-like coolness as he rouged his face and powdered his hair with. If he had learned to read, the accomplishment was not used for the purpose of developing or even amusing the mind, but to save him from the consequences of any crimes he committed in the pursuit of his pleasures: he claimed benefit of clergy and by reading his neck-verse was let off. His amusements were often barbarous, if not murderous. Bull-baiting and bear-baiting were mild compared to the delights of the Mohawks. These were young men of fashion who roamed the streets at night and knocked down and maltreated and often brutally killed unoffending passers-by. After this their occasional resort to the sword as highwaymen in order to replenish their empty purses for further gambling in the coffee-houses seems almost excusable, though the custom made all the streets of London and all the roads about it unsafe even for soldiers like Colonel Esmond. Men returning to their houses at night had to join bands, and any carriage or coach going a journey had to be well protected by armed men. Yet the highwayman when caught was quite a hero; his name was a nine day's talk.

And little wonder; for the whole of society was constituted on his cut-throat principles gilt-edged with gallantry. Every woman was on the alert for a blot on her neighbour's reputation; "if Esmond would have but run away with the wife even of a citizen, 'tis my belief that the old dowager would have pawned her diamonds to pay his damages." Every man was ready to take the purse or the reputation or the honour or, if need be, the life of any man however close a friend.

In politics the same characteristics predominated. There was nothing but treachery and intrigue, cowardly attack and cowardly retreat, unscrupulous selfishness sheathed in courtesy, but ever ready to leap out of its scabbard. Thackeray makes his Jacobite Esmond say, "The conspiracies were so like murder, so cowardly in the means used, so wicked in the end, that our nation has sure done well in throwing off all the allegiance and fidelity to the unhappy family that could not vindicate its right except by such treachery—by such dark intrigue and base agents." "There were designs against King William that were no more honourable than the ambushes of cut-throats and foot-pads." He was the true Gulliver of Swift, whilst the Lilliputians were the Jesuits and hangers-on of the exiled court. The exiled prince was "a weak, priest-ridden, woman-ridden man with such puny allies and weapons as his own poor nature led him to choose." Even young Lord Castlewood, after all the enthusiasm of loyalty, says of him, "He seems to sneer at everything. He is not like a king." And enemies and secret allies such as these produced like natures in the legitimate sphere of politics. Lord Bolingbroke with his shallow cynicism and pretences of truth and faith is the best instance of the statesman of the time.

Nor were the wars of the age conducted on higher principles. It was but systematic treachery, plunder, and assassination. Esmond goes minutely into the operations for the relief of Lille to show how Marlborough sent a rival general, Webb, with such a small force and so hampered, that they would all be annihilated, and to make sure of this result sold the information to the enemy; then when the little band stood out and by their courage defeated the French and his projects, he stole all the honour from the hero. The picture of the great duke is indeed appalling; "he told a lie or cheated a fond woman or robbed a poor beggar of a halfpenny with a like awful serenity"; "he had this of the god-like in him that he could see a hero perish or a sparrow fall with the same amount of sympathy for either"; "he could be haughty, be humble, threaten, repent, weep, grasp your hand or stab you whenever he saw occasion". And all the wars of the time partook of his cut-throat sublimity.

It is a pleasure to turn to the literary world from this scene of brigandage *in excelsis*, although we have here still such a terrible figure as that of Swift with the brutal boldness and cowardice of a literary highwayman, such a mean figure as that of Pope with his spiteful ways, and such a tyrannical hypocrite as Bolingbroke, with his patronage of success and his cruelty to the poor hacks of journalism. For we have the sweet, impulsive, though fuddled, bohemianism of Steele, and the sweet, calm, though conventional and fuddled, bohemianism of Addison. But even in their life there is something that is repellent, a subservience to the false ideals and purposes of the day, an untrustworthiness that deals loosely with the reputation or the property of others, and a slight taint from the gross manners and morals of the age. Nothing but Esmond's own generous tolerance can surpass that of Steele in attractiveness. And yet he had drunk in the selfish, disloyal atmosphere. The time was passionate with falsity and injustice.

There is no figure in the time that so draws the heart of Thackeray as that of the sweet-natured drunken bohemian. Addison with his reserve and dignified serenity seemed to draw him still more ; but as soon as he looked closely into the life, he found the noble sweetness vanish into shallow condescension and affected manners. It was these two drew him to the age ; perchance he might find that it was full of men and women like them. But when he looked closely into it the vision faded away ; and he was left with the most repulsive elements of civilization on his hands. The only attractive nature in the whole of it was the much-despised and ridiculed bohemian. Like noble characters he had to create and throw into the sea of vice and affectation. None could he find. The leprosy of meanness and falsity had eaten all that was nobly human out of men's hearts. If any were great, they were malignant Swifts that hated the whole race ; the rest, if stripped of rouge and powder and the padding of affected manners, were the pigmy dwellers in Lilliput. Steele was a reveller that had strayed from happier times, filled with the bibulous laughter of Rabelais, the philosophical spirit of Touchstone, the mad humour of Falstaff ending in tears, and the more

pathetic side of Thackeray's own genius, the side that could weep and be sorrowful over life. Happy, blundering, bibulous, weeping Dick had wandered into a world that was nothing but sneers and bitterness for him.

The picture of that central shrine of the age, the coffee-house rises easily before the mind as we read *Esmond*. There are the long rows of boxes; in some the smoke of meals, in others the rattle of the dice or the silence of cards impresses the senses. The news-sheet with the last despatch from the camp of Marlborough is eagerly snatched and read, whilst outside we hear a ballad on the last murder or execution bawled with hoarse voice. Up and down the open space strides a tall form in cassock, the face and stormy blue eyes filled with the scowl of disappointed and aggressive egotism; ever and anon he hears some witticism or scandal pass from lip to lip, from box to box, and he stops to hurl a malediction or a stinging repartee that brings a clumsy silence amongst the listeners. But there is one group that pays no heed to the malignant wit. Peals of sweet unthinking laughter rise from it and drown the angry cleric's voice; the glasses on this table are replenished every minute, as one of the revelers, sedate yet half-intoxicated, reads a manuscript; he alone resists the epidemic laughter of his neighbour with the homely face, the generous lines about his mouth, and the marks of sweet nature over the whole man. Who but the staid and unbending reader could keep the smile from rising to the lips? For every eye soon wanders from the bitter sneer of the pacing satirist and lights up with the bibulous good-humour of the laugher, whilst the embryo slander or contempt falls still-born from the critic lips. The vanity of the malignant egotist is wounded and he approaches the hilarious group to silence them with his cruel indignation. With unsteady gait the droll comes out to meet him; and all expect a rough rencontre.

But he reels past the sneerer unconscious of his anger and finds his inebriate way towards the curtain that hangs across the wall behind. It lifts, and a striking scene entrances the eye. The portal of a noble abbey appears; through it we pass and see the monks in mediæval habits come and go. The reeling humourist still leads the way across the echoing floor of stone. The light of evening streams through the

splendour of the windows and paints the stone with coloured figures of the saints. Low and sweet sounds the vesper bell; and mellowed by the masonry the swelling notes of a solemn chant floats across the courts. Its rise and fall become the guide of our foot-steps. Into the dim light of the noble chapel we pass; the air is sick with incense; from the chancel peals the organ, sinking ever into low notes that seem to breathe from another world. Cowled figures kneel upon the floor, and there upon a bier rests the dead form of our jovial guide, his face now flushless and pale; a grim and shadowy angel hovers over it still hesitant. The music melts away. When suddenly the eyelids rise and from the lips across the deep silence breathes the whisper "Thou great Perhaps! shall I not solve thee yet?" The frame quivers, the grave-clothes move and rustle; the tonsured heads around are slowly raised with awe upon the faces. And how strangely is the winged darkness that fluttered over the bier transformed! There bends over the awakening life a giant with his round and jovial face, and he waves a wine-jar and a drinking-cup above the opening eyes. A warm flush mantles the cheeks of the prostrate form; the hands rise to clutch the wine-cup, and with returning life a boisterous laugh bursts from the throat of the grave-clad jester, as he pours down it draught after draught. He leaps from his bier upon another giant or warrior who sits and combs cannon-balls from his hair. And in a moment the funereal scene is changed into bacchanalian riot; the dirge becomes a merry tune; the cowled figures dance like satyrs with wine-cups in their hands; and in their midst choruses in loud revel the fugitive from death "Let us seek the shrine of the bottle".

Out into the vineyard they leap and dance and frolic, the grim and shadowy angel above them sounding out aerial music to their gestures. Down the rows of vines they antic, seizing the purple clusters and staining their lips and fingers with the juice; and on the wind rises louder and louder the song of the bottle divine. Time flutters round the rout in the gauzy form of a cupid; space shrinks into an elf; the hours flee with lightning swiftness past it. Flowers spring up in their footsteps. And all the world and all the monkish satyrs seem made of glass wherein gleams every

thought and passion as clear as stars in a pool. They reach a huge portal, arched like a tun, and over it see woven in grapes the legend "Drink and be true." Through it we pass and find ourselves in a vast hall built of amphora bottles, fountains in the midst running red wine; at the apex stands a lofty altar with a wine-jar for shrine and out of it echoes the oracle "drink or drink not, but be true." And the altar seems to open and let the revellers through into the street of a great city; and still the dread angel leads the way. He stops before a tavern over whose portal is fixed the head of a boar covered with a leafy branch. We enter and there again our jovial friend is stretched upon a bed of death, his "tun of man" in white, his fingers playing with flowers; around stand his drinking comrades and the hostess, red from debauch; yet all is hushed; and the dying tongue "babbles o' green fields"; but when it falls silent and the dark wings sweep down, a sound of weeping is heard and the cry "would I were with him wheresoe'er he is, whether in heaven or in hell."

And as we bowed our heads, the echo came as of hammers striking on his coffin. But there mingled with it the merry shout of a child; and our reveller guide in the form of a little boy burst in and beat upon the coffin lid with his battledore, crying "come play with me my father." And a rustle was heard within, the black sides burst, and the roseate face of the drunken jester broke into a smile. He had but moved from his seat in the coffee-house for a moment; and the dread and winged messenger changed back into the scowling cynic in the cassock. The reveller raised his hand to his face and down there fell his mask and left a strange countenance with sweetness beaming beneath spectacles that spanned a bridgeless nose, and a reluctant smile half ironic, half beneficent played round the mouth. But the winged darkness seemed to overshadow it again and all the living forms had vanished and the wall of the coffee-house seemed to have a tablet on it with the legend "Adsum" and beneath the interpretation "Fun is good, and truth still better, but love is best of all." The humourist was dead like his creations too and before me lay my Esmond, the cue of my day-reverie.

THE CASTLEWOODS.

THE CASTLEWOODS.

HOW closely the ages are bound together ! Whether it is an increasing purpose or a decreasing purpose runs through them, they are like the years of a man's life rigidly bound together by a tangle of cause and effect. The old simile of a line of torch-bearers is untrue ; for there is no falling out of the line of destiny ; on they must go whether to bad or to good. There is no standing still. That which one age sows the next reaps. Decay or development proceeds inevitably, and the roots of each age are tendrilled far into the ages before. Races, nations, religions, they all have their seasons and sweep on unbrokenly to their doom. And one of the chief bonds that bind their life together is heredity ; the soul and the character of one year appear with modifications in the next.

But it is families that show the principle at work most clearly. Passions and methods of reasoning or humour, traits of character, physical peculiarities appear and re-appear most variedly transformed or modified in child and grandchild. At times they will leap a generation from the blending of the elements of the other parent's nature and from the change of circumstances or conditions ; but with strange persistence they will start up again like ghosts of the past. It is physical likenesses that persist most. But, as man rises and gains mastery of the material part of him, the spirit acquires the imitative quality. That which the parent develops most in himself as a hard-won habit will often become the instinct of the child, working with the ease of an unconscious function.

It is not virtues, however, or useful spiritual qualities that implant themselves in a race most easily. For the animal in us is ever dragging us down and it needs constant effort to resist its power. The spiritual elements that have close

affinity with it, the appetites and passions, are ever edging towards excess and dominance. In some strong family natures brutish wildness returns upon the virtuous and cultivated parts with the rapidity and overwhelming power of tropical vegetation over the ruins of a city ; the conquered space of virtue goes back again to unmastered barbarism. And if a passion or fault or disease be reinforced in any generation, in the next it corrupts the whole nature and drags it down to destruction. It is this that, working as a blind instinct, has discouraged the intermarriage of relations. The isolation of a "sport" amongst animals or plants soon raises it into a distinctive kind. And with the unstable equilibrium of the human character and constitution this is even more likely to have force amongst men. A hereditary weakness of brain or tissue or mind is doubled in degree when it exists in both father and mother.

But even without this duplication we see families rise and fall like individuals and nations. Some mischance emphasises a fault become hereditary and the downward path is begun. Some success adds to the trust in a virtue or habit and it absorbs the best energies and raises the family into a power. And the same family often shows the most chequered career ; now its energies and passions are narrowed and concentrated to one purpose like a river between the beetling crags of a gorge ; again all its life spreads out into a gentle, shallow expanse, aimless, resultless ; or it is lost in sinks of idleness and vice, like a stream that soaks through acres of marsh, fit for no useful purpose without infinite labour. Heredity is a power as strong as circumstances. It gives the temper and qualities to the metal of our natures ; circumstances only forge it into some purposeful form. And it works in the most subtle and unexpected ways. We aim at a goal of action and find our natures come near it ; when suddenly some caprice seizes us and turns us from it ; this is the shadow of some ancestor's character thrown on our life. Most of our unaccountable words or actions are to be traced back to this source. And the principle throws the most interesting light on the history of families.

The ancients could not find a word to express this singular phenomenon that was ever making history so

tragic. The Greeks could see a sin working out its vengeance within a given race or strain of blood; and they attributed it to the Furies, wild goddesses who lashed the sons for the transgressions of the fathers. They could not discover how it worked by nature. Some called it destiny or fate, a dark force that sooner or later found out the offender or some descendant and made him its victim. The Jews, too, felt the law working with inevitable force "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." They did investigate it but were willing to accept it as the justice of heaven. All men have recognised it in one form or another. And the old tragedians of Greece took full advantage of it as the bond of interest in their plays. The woes of the Atridae, the family of Atreus, rushing down like a river of crime through all his descendants from the one fountain-head, the wrong that brother did to brother, became the favourite theme of Aeschylus. The woes of Oedipus and his family arising from a crime he had committed are the theme of Sophocles. Sure they were that a sin would find its punishment sooner or later.

What they did not see was that the world is governed through natural laws that work in our own characters; and the violation of any one of these leads to its recoil on our heads and the heads of our children, as surely as disease uncured will work our death. And one of the most piteous features of this is that those whom we love and work for are bound up in the consequences of our faults and weaknesses and sins.

Thackeray, though he never states the law in the modern scientific form, is keenly conscious of it and makes the hereditary power of character and habit one of the main bonds of his plots, one of the main themes of his satire. In the novel of *Esmond* he seems scarcely ever to lose consciousness of it. Studying the history of last century with its romance of the Stuart exiles and the Stuart rebellions, he got at the real secret of their failure in heredity. It is the doom of the Stuarts that overhangs this story like a pall of cloud; now the sunlight breaks through only to vanish and leave the cause hopeless and blank. The author ever steps on the stage like the Greek chorus



and chants the fate that is threatening. And we feel from the first that the cause which is stirring so much nobleness and loyalty is base and fore-doomed. Again and again we hear the note of prophetic woe concerning the "line of kings whose race seemed to be doomed like the Atridae of old." And a glance is ever and anon thrown backward to the ancestry of the Pretender that his weakness and debauchery may be explained. With such a father as James the Second how could he fail to be weak-willed and licentious and untrustworthy? With such ancestors as James the First and Charles the First how could he fail to be wilful and despotic and selfish? Nothing could save him or his son after him from the fate that haunted the Stuarts since ever they came to the English throne, the fate of capricious and licentious wills. From Mary Queen of Scots and her sensuous, inconstant, and faithless life this family of English kings drew the taint in the blood that made them run upon the serried spears of destiny. Never could they keep troth with anyone; never did they show gratitude or loyalty to those who were loyal to them; never could they place duty before pleasure; never could they realise that they, the chosen and anointed of heaven, could be disobeyed or resisted; they had the airs of omnipotence with the heart and brain of fools. And the climax of the long tragedy is given here with great vividness.

It has almost the sting of epigram, the loyalty and self-sacrifice and nobleness of the adherents, and the drunken futility and licentiousness of the object of their worship and devotion. The tragic failure at the close of the book relieves the nobler characters from all the duties which they thought loyalty laid upon them.

But the most tragic feature of the story is the moral ruin this family spreads on all sides. The old type of royalty gave them unbounded influence over a large section of their subjects. All their courtiers and adherents were willing to deliver up body and soul to their service. They set the fashion in morality as in less important things. And all who looked to them as the fountain of power and place, fortune and title, also took their tone from them. Belief in the divine right of Stuart kingship was absolution from all sins and crimes. The court of James the First was gross

or virulent in its passions. In that of his son, although there was chivalry in dress and manners, it went no deeper. Then came the first period of tattered and bohemian royalty; and Charles the Second and his courtiers brought back to England a fresh contagion of the worst Continental vices. We have to look no further than the literature of the Restoration, written as it was for the court, to see how even the shows of chivalry and morality were abandoned. The great body of the nation remained sound and pure at heart. But the nobility and gentry that frequented this court lost every mark of superiority except haughty scorn of all other ranks, and the challenge to a duel for an insult, the poor shreds and tatters of chivalry. Coarse in their vices, they abandoned their wives and daughters to the grossest of lives. And with such morals can we expect any reverence for humanity or nobleness or duty? Even the chivalrous and distinguished air, that, when they were sober, threw a halo of royalty and romance round the exiled princes James and Charles, vanished before the baseness of their passions. How could a cause succeed that had such leaders and objects? And how could it fail to ruin and make ignoble those who completely abandoned themselves to it? It is this degrading influence of the Stuarts and their cause that Thackeray paints in his novel, with a hero and a heroine to resist it.

He takes a Cavalier family as an instance and traces in it the history of their devotion to this race of royal debauchees and ingrates. He gives as ancestor on the mother's side the only daughter and heiress of the Esmonds, lords of Castlewood, and on the male side Henry Poyns, who, probably meant by Thackeray to be a descendant of Shakespeare's young profligate and parasite of Prince Hal, ran off with her in the reign of Elizabeth whilst a page in her father's household. The old and exhausted blood was doubtless renewed by this importation from the middle or lower class, but with a strain of deceit and irregularity of passion apparent in the elopement. The grossness of James the First's court had not full opportunity of ruining the nature of her son by this marriage and developing the bad hereditary elements; for he (Sir Francis) spent most of his life as a soldier on the Continent, and his office of groom

of the King's posset came late in life and had to be filled by his son Sir George as deputy. It was here that the Stuart evil began to have its full force. Mercenary falsity and licentiousness came to the surface, combined with strong partisanship. The party of the court was now dividing by a wide chasm from that of the city; and yet for the sake of her money this royal groom of the posset married the daughter of a goldsmith, and with poetic justice was disappointed of her fortune on her father's death. His partisanship developed into loyalty and he melted the family plate for Charles the First and got in return a peerage for his house. He lost his estate under the Commonwealth and his only son Eustace at the battle of Worcester and, like all the Cavaliers that remained loyal, he became an exile and wanderer.

During this stage it is that the Stuart vice in him becomes pollution. His daughter he gave up to the tender mercies of the two profligate sons of Charles the First, the two who were afterwards Charles the Second and James the Second. And to reach such a state of abandonment he had himself sunk deep into the abyss of corruption. The Restoration gave him back his estates, but not his virtue or that of his daughter; and during the polluted reigns of the two Stuart monarchs he traded with them in his daughter's disgrace and retrieved his fortunes to some small extent. His nephew and heir, Thomas, a debauched brawler and tavern-haunter, the son of that brother of his who had turned renegade from the royalists, offered the dregs of his morality and his diseased youth to make sure of the inheritance; he married the abandoned profligate Isabella, who appears so often in the earlier part of this novel as the wicked and worldly dowager, mentor of the hero and hater of the heroine. But the marriage was invalid; for in his fresher and less polluted youth he had ruined a Belgian girl and on what seemed his death-bed married her, abandoning her as soon as he recovered. The issue of this union is the narrator and hero, who, on the death of the poor diseased offspring of the second unhallowed marriage, appears at Castlewood as page to the Viscountess and protégé of Father Holt, the emissary of the exiles during the reigns of William and Mary, and Anne. On the death of Thomas, Earl of

Castlewood, at the Battle of the Boyne, without publicly acknowledging his boy, the title and estate, as much as remained of it, passed to his cousin Francis, the son of the Rev. Francis Esmond who had been slain in the defence of the castle against the parliamentarians in 1647, whilst his former betrothed, the old dowager of the novel, was pardoned for her intrigues only by the leniency of King William and retired, after being imprisoned, into a house in a suburb of London.

The new earl was altogether a finer specimen of the Castlewoods than had been the head of the house for generations. He had not been spoiled by the fortunes or misfortunes of the Cavaliers and had never been poisoned by the Stuart virus. And he doubtless inherited from the brave churchman, his father, his manliness and loyalty, whilst he probably saw in boyhood purer manners and morals in the clerical household, in which he had been trained, than the courtier party were accustomed to. On discovering the character of his betrothed, his cousin Isabella, he had broken his promise to her, given up his regiment, and never more appeared at the court of Charles the Second. He lived as a squire on a little estate in the country and thus escaped the contamination of the Stuart court. He married the daughter of a rural dean and thus carried out the traditions of his father's house. And she with her rustic purity of life and manners added strength to the simple virtues he had by nature or by his country life. Thus when they come upon the scene as Lord and Lady Castlewood with their two children they are fit objects of worship for the little page of the household, who knows nothing of father or mother and believes a bar-sinister to be across his escutcheon. They have the manly bearing of an aristocracy without its scornful haughtiness, the loyalty and honour of the Cavaliers without their ragged morals and debased manners. They had been trained to comparative poverty and self-control without any of the sordidness of a struggle with them. He had the manly bearing of a soldier with the bluff heartiness and candour of the squire. She had the courtly grace of a queen's maiden with the simple purity of one who had never seen courts.

But the Castlewood doom is soon upon them. The voluptuous selfishness, implanted in the Castlewood nature

during the reigns of James the First and his son, comes out under the influence of the smiles of fortune, although, as long as all goes well, the household is happy as before. The scourge of last century's beauty, the small-pox, appears in the village, and young Harry Esmond brings the infection from the blacksmith's to the Castle. Lady Castlewood and her boy Frank and he sicken, whilst her husband and daughter flee from it. Brave on the battle-field, Lord Castlewood had no courage in the presence of this ravager of handsome faces. And when he returned and found the bloom of his wife's beauty brushed off by the rude hand of the disease, his love for her vanished; it was, like that of all his family, but a casual and fleeting passion. Already had he shown the tendency of his blood towards excess at the winecup and towards inconstancy and gross thoughts of the other sex. But after the light of love died out of his eyes as he looked at his lady, the long pent-up spiritual leprosy of the Stuart aristocracy burst forth and the complete ruin of all the happiness and purity of the household was only a question of time. He abandoned himself to debauch and irregularity of life, step by step driving the love and devotion of his wife away from him. It scarcely needed the appearance of the duelling rake, Lord Mohun, on the scene to bring the catastrophe, so rapid was the descent to hades. But when Harry Esmond returned from Cambridge just before intending to take orders, he found a skeleton in the house in the shape of some secret communicated to the Earl by Father Holt who had reappeared; it was the legitimacy of the youthful page of the house and his right to the title and estates. Thenceforth the descent became headlong. Castlewood grew reckless in his debauchery and gambling, and soon quarrelled with his rakish guest through fear of his licentious designs. The result was death in a duel and confession with his dying breath that he had kept Henry Esmond out of his rights.

His son Frank Castlewood who succeeded him was even punier in intellect and character than he. And, although he had the manliness and candour and bravery of his father emphasised by a little self-control that he drew from his mother's nature and from Henry Esmond's example, the curse of the Castlewoods was soon upon him, the Stuart

influence in his blood ; his voluptuous and weak nature maimed his life and gave him up, bound hand and foot, to his wives and their relations. As soon as the noblest element in him, reverence for him who had handed him over his right to the title and estates, failed him, he vanished characterless and futile.

In his children as painted in *The Virginians* we see the strain of blood grow worse again. His two wives were far inferior to his mother both in elevation of character and in intellect. His daughters have all the commonplace, husband-hunting affectations of the idle, selfish women of a hereditarily leisured class, along with the falsity and voluptuous tendencies of his family. Thackeray is unsparing in his satire on Lady Maria's attempt to inveigle the young Virginian into marriage when she thought him wealthy and her mean rejection of him when his elder brother appeared. It is a repulsive picture, that of the Castlewood women in *The Virginians*, leading as they do such a mean, vain, purposeless life ; there is not one trait that can be called noble or generous or even humane in their character or intercourse. It is one of the puzzles of existence to know what good end such butterfly lives have served, so common amongst the women of the well-to-do classes in former times, though not so common now.

But the men of the Castlewood family of the middle of last century were worse. In them there was none of the modesty or self-concealment real or affected that covered over the grossness of the Castlewood nature on the female side. The old spiritual leprosy of the family came out in all its hideous repulsiveness. Even the manliness and candour that had added somewhat of a grace to the vices of their ancestors had vanished in these young men, perhaps driven forth by the shifts for money their gambling compelled ; and in their place came the most degraded cozenage, fraud that the smuggler and highwayman of their day would have been ashamed of, though fashionable among the aristocratic ruffianism of the time. Of the two perhaps the Earl was the worse ; for he resorted to the most deliberate and heartless deceit and cheating ; his brother Will had drawn perhaps from the candour of his ancestors a certain unblushing openness in his roguery ; he was a bully. Both had taken

their manners from the racecourse and tavern, and were most accomplished in the tricks and slang of blackguard life. There is not a tinge of wit or education or bravery to redeem their characters.

It is almost a pleasure to turn from them to that wicked old wit, their aunt the Baroness of Bernstein. She at least has intellect and purpose and occasionally a flash of generosity to light up the memory of her vices. We can almost forgive her her lies and her fraud upon Lady Maria for the sake of her hearty admiration of her young Virginian nephew Harry Warrington. Battered as her old heart is, it has still a soft corner in it for her old adorer, his grandfather, Colonel Henry Esmond.

For this vain, over-bearing, painted, gambling, old harridan of The Virginians is the lovely, piquant, and sparkling Beatrix of Esmond. It is age and wickedness that have wrought the transformation. And if we read between the lines in the earlier novel, we shall find the half-repulsive portrait of the later. It is only the love and adoration of Henry Esmond and the bright freshness of youth that transfigure her in the former and hide the dark features in the Castlewood nature. Even as a little child, dancing like a sunbeam through the half-ruined courts of the old castle, she shows the prophetic lines of her fate. She has no thought but of self and the pleasures it may draw out of life. Not a generous sentiment ever crosses her lips; not a thought of the happiness of others ever enters her mind. From the moment she first appears she is a full-blown coquette, eager to bring lovers to their knees. Nor does she reveal any pity or sympathy for those who suffer. She has nothing of her mother in her but her beauty and her only fault—jealousy. The Castlewood elements in her are triumphant—bravery and candour, it is true, but still more their Stuart infection of the blood, their lack of the sense of morality or nobleness of life, and their unruly passion for pleasure. We feel it is only a question of time—the breaking out of this spiritual leprosy into full force. And it is her ambition gives it vent. For she is almost as ambitious as she is pleasure-loving. As soon as the Stuart prince appears within her circle, we know what will be the result; she will follow him, like the old dowager,

her father's cousin, into disgrace. The curtain falls at the close of Esmond on his moral catastrophe; and in *The Virginians* it rises on the results of it, an evil name as of a witch and a dishonoured old age relieved only by her passion for gambling and scandal and bitter irony. The tragedy is the most saddening in Thackeray. Yet it was inevitable with the nature she was born with and the age she lived in; no suffering or discipline could have averted the tragic moral end.

The reverse is shown in the life of Henry Esmond. His lowly birth on the one side, his lowly up-bringing in childhood, the contumely he suffered from the blot upon his parentage, and the long self-sacrifice he bore, chastened and sweetened a nature that drew meekness and self-discipline from an injured mother. Not a new strain alone is needed to master a taint in the blood, but the discipline of circumstances too, developing the new tendencies into habits of thought and feeling and action. Amid the surge of vice and falsity and intrigue that filled his age, Henry Esmond stood pure, loyal, true, and self-controlling, a strange phenomenon amongst the aristocracy that had owed most of its origin and all its character to the false, pleasure-loving, and profligate Stuarts. But he and his wife had the sense of duty strongly developed in them, and this further developed in their only child Rachel, doubtless because she was an only child of elderly parents, into martinettish and dictatorial prudery even to them. Happily her husband, George Warrington, survived their marriage only a few years; and her rigid discipline along with the simple untainted life of the colonies brought out the virtues of both the families, the Castlewoods and the Warringtons, in her two boys George and Harry; and they grew like their grandfather, Thackeray's hero, though the one inherited only his literary tastes and Thackerayan irony, and the other his military habits and simple candour. But in them his noble loyalty, having leaped a generation, in its nobleness at least came out more strongly than ever. And thus through the ages a stream of virtue flowed from this heroic life.

How little we realise the unending character of actions and habits! We may cease to notice their results; yet on

they ripple like rings from the agitation of a pool ; and there is no shore to meet ; for time is shoreless ; only the cross-currents and storms and the ripples of other actions and storms break their force. We fail to keep before us the infinite influence of each step we take ; it guides the next we take ; and all together shape the character which is again the source of all our conduct. And into our children or, failing these, our friends pass, in spite of us, our tendencies evil or good ; and down through the generations they flow coalescing with others and gathering force. The history of man is like a great whispering-gallery along which the smallest utterance gains volume and power independently of the speaker, till that which was spoken in secret seems to be shouted from the house-tops. Once issued from our lips we have no control over it. And still less have we control over those instincts and winds of destiny that breathe from us unconsciously into our children and friends.

And yet when we try to mould a deed to some imagined form we fail of it and seem to make it worse than if unaided it had come to pass. The purpose seems to glance aside and mar God's handiwork. And often-times, when we would choose our course amid the labyrinth of life, to choose well seems a hopeless task ; this way and that ray out unending paths that lead we know not whither. Our poor and momentary lights reveal but a step before us. And, when we think of all the noble actions that have erred of their mark and the fair intentions that have worked but evil, our bewilderment grows deeper ; and we rush forward hoping for the best, thankful if only we fall not by the way or drag some other fellow-man into dangers he would otherwise avoid. It scarcely matters yet the age we live in, so imperfect are the workings and the aims of human life, so little have we done what man with all his lofty thoughts is bound to do, so far are we from that ideal goal we travel towards, so near the beast that we have left behind. The world is moving on, we see, if only we look back and watch the course of history with its decreasing tyrannies and wrongs and slaveries. But so slowly does it move that it seems to stand or even to recede, and the faith of those who think it is the worst of all possible worlds is accepted as true.

Nature hath ever had a noble strain of beauty in her : the everlasting mountains were as gloriously transfigured by the sunset or the dawn at the making of the world as now : the sweetness of the moonlight, the brilliance of the day, the shifting colours of the seasons, the dread sublimity of tempests, were as impressive in primeval ages as in these our human times. And who can judge of ages gone or measure what experience is within the life of animals? Pains they have, decay and death ; but do these ever pass into the agonies that man's keen fancy makes them ? Bewildered stand we in the surge of dubious thought and know not what the end of all shall be. And, ere we can give absolute answer to the questions, death comes upon us and sweeps us forth into oblivion.

And yet we can divide the noble from the mean, the godlike from the brutal amongst our fellows and amongst our thoughts : and with the one our souls soar upwards in divine exhilaration, with the other they appear to grovel in the dust. Every new age has shown a propagation and a strengthening of "the diviner element." And in the breaking sunlight of this thought the world reshapes itself on brighter lines ; our faith in human destiny returns, and in the future looms a being as much nobler than we as we are nobler than the beasts. Heredity, that seemed before but a perpetuator of the evil elements of man, becomes an angel of light. The dark demoniac features of human life fall into shadow and all that brightens and ennobles it takes strength and increase to itself.

But if there is one virtue that gives hope of reaching the ideal height of human nature, it is loyalty, the most godlike feeling in our breasts. It is not love alone ; for that is often base, and even the best of it falls ever far short of the divine. Along with love there goes to the making of this virtue a loftier feeling, reverence for the ideal in humanity ; and this is kin with the highest worship, the finest flower of religion. Only the noblest natures have it ; and if there is a proof of base degree, of bestial descent, it is the traitorous thought or word or deed to him who has been only true and good to us. There is no more demoniac thing on earth than treachery. And no truer test of the divinity of a religion is there to be found than the place it gives amongst

the things it counts accursed to betrayal of a trustful friend ; if it forgives its priests or believers this sin against the godlike upon earth, then is it base and grovelling ; but if it counts all falsity and untruth, all outrage upon loyalty past forgiveness, then has it in its heart the sheen of heaven. It is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and he who commits it never more shall find sound footing in existence ; all the world grows treacherous to him ; for his soul is filled with treachery ; whom shall he trust that has betrayed his friend ? Where shall he find a soul that he will not suspect ? Alone he shall stand amid an ocean of friendship, friendless still death still the beating of his suspicious heart. It is the lesson of lessons that our satirist would teach ; vanity of vanities all is vanity except the loving, loyal soul. And as we bid farewell to his heroes, we seem to see them beckon across the gulf of years and hear them cry : "There is no nobleness but loyalty ; when all things fail you and the world is dark and life but a blind groping towards the light, this shall be certain, this transcends all other virtues."

HENRY ESMOND.



HENRY ESMOND.

HOW strangely contradictory our natures are ! We are ever longing for perfection ; the whole creation groaneth to produce the perfect man ; year after year we struggle to throw out our faults ; age after age mankind has striven after a goal it is still millions of ages from reaching. Yet we shrink from the thought of its realisation amongst us. There is a monotony about the thought of smooth perfection that is repellent to the unreclaimed and natural man. Even the unbroken harmony and happiness of heaven weary our thoughts at times and make us rebel against the picture of it so overdrawn. We are impatient of the virtuous man who is ever in the right, of the painfully good man who rebukes us by his freedom from aberration, of the omniscient man who always knows beforehand everything that is said and done. We sicken of all too ripe perfection. And amid unregenerate mankind an angel would lead but an unhappy life.

Partly it is the imperfections we are conscious of in ourselves that are the source of this, tied down as our better nature is to the animal in us. We know that with the grossness of our fleshly element ever dragging us down it is impossible that anyone can come so near perfection as some would seem. Most of us know too well what an unceasing struggle it needs to keep the weak or wild humanity within us in check and can scarcely believe it human to be rid of all its weaknesses and passions. By far the noblest and strongest characters are made out of struggle. The tempests of passions sweep through them and threaten them with ruin and only after long and earnest conflict do they find self-mastery. They who start life with perfect control of themselves have no self to control, and like "fruit too early ripe" they are "rotten too too soon."

Another reason for our recoil from human perfection is that so many have used it as the mask of villany or of gross or wily purpose at least. In the world it is the analogue of religious hypocrisy ; it is the most complete and effective weapon for attaining the basest of ends, paralysing its victims and leaving them off their guard. And this instinct of recoil from all that professes to be perfect in human form is our only protection against the design it masks. For with it, however well practised and cultivated, there goes an indefinable trail of the serpent, a faint perfume of sly effeminacy to stir the antipathy of all that is sincere and manly in us. It is this air of purring, feline softness that has engendered in our natures the feeling of repulsion from the humanity that professes to be without fault. The little taint of weakness or passion or temper seems to bring out the wholesomeness of the rest of the character. As long as mankind is mixed of flesh and spirit,

“You gods will give us
Some faults to make us men,”

not angels or demons.

When we turn from life to literature, we still have the same repulsion for the perfect hero who has not been moulded out of faults. There is a lack of life-likeness in the man or woman gifted with everything that life desires and every moral and intellectual quality that makes life easy. And whenever we find a novelist or dramatist introducing such a character, we wish to know no more of it, we know all we need. For perfection has but one rôle, imperfection has ten thousand. There is but one story to tell of the angel in human form. There is a wholesome and entertaining irregularity and variety in the blemishes and corruptions of mankind, if not even in the vicious and evil element. It is this that makes censure and slander so much more pleasant and common than praise. We are not noble enough to see and describe the infinite variety there is in the good. But again it is difficult to find tragedy in the good and still more difficult to find humour ; and without one or other of these an imaginative book has little chance of interesting. In Milton it is not heaven that attracts us or the description of the angels ; it is Satan and the conclaves in hell. And much as he loved Paradise

Regained it has not one reader for every hundred of *Paradise Lost*.

In the play and the novel we feel this even more than in the epic ; for we expect more of actual human nature, less of the sublime and god-like. And hence it is that we are so often much more drawn to the subordinate characters than to the protagonist ; they have the imperfections of the men and women we know, he is too often "faultily faultless." It is so hard to elevate a human being into the place of a hero and yet give him faults that will not interfere with his heroism. The danger the imaginative creator runs is in making him insipidly perfect, in drawing him out of the range of human sympathies. It is here that Scott, great novelist though he be, fails ; we feel that his heroes and heroines are but melodramatic angels or paste-board demigods ; they strut and sentimentalise and show us no feature that makes them distinctive as men. It is here too that Dickens shows his inferior art ; his humorous characters and jesters have each something to mark them off from the crowd ; they are delightfully human ; but his serious characters are chiefly sentimentalists and stage-walkers untouched by the frailties that belong to ordinary men.

And this, too, is one of the points that mark off Shakespeare from most other painters of character ; he is not afraid to endow his heroes and heroines with the weaknesses of common humanity. It is their struggle or failure to throw out some one of these that so engages our thoughts with them ; the minor characters never attract more than they. Neither in comedy nor in tragedy does any one of them stand free of something that makes them the theme of laughter or sorrow. Neither in the Roman nor in the English histories is there anyone that transcends the faults of men. Even Henry the Fifth, who is so often accepted as his hero *par excellence*, has deeply branded into his nature religious hypocrisy and the love of histrionic attitudes. Even Brutus, who is nearest perfection, finds himself in a false position, his country ruined and friendship outraged by him. And Prospero, who is the wise counterpart of the poet himself in his latest manhood, has much that is faulty in him to master before he reaches the power of forgiveness.

Thackeray's art is of the same quality as Shakespeare's, though not to be compared with it in degree. He is the observer of human nature and the fearless artist of character. He is not afraid to make his protagonists like the men and women he meets in life. In fact he errs on the other side if he errs at all: for as a satirist he has to see the faults more than the merits, and to add the touch of ridicule to them that makes them fall beyond the sublime. And he does not shrink from laughing at his hero or heroine, knowing that it is the lot of man with his petty nature thrown into the shadow of infinity. Nay, he does not hesitate to let his readers laugh at himself and his own peccadilloes. He ranks himself on his own anatomy table, reveals the diseases and germs of evil that grow in his humanity, and invites the looker-on to notice how like he is to his brother offenders. It was natural then that his heroes should be far from perfect; for heroes, being the idealized better side of an author's nature, must take the shadows also that he is willing to confess to. Nowhere, then, in the novels of our times do we find the protagonists so humanly faulty as all through those of Thackeray. Even the noble Colonel Newcome, whose death brings us ever so near to the fountain of tears, has his limitations in temper and judgment, is full of prejudices, and puts himself into positions that excite little but laughter.

It is all the more striking to come across one that almost seems an exception. And Henry Esmond has so few of the vices or weaknesses that attach to the humanity of his day that we seem to have found at last a hero of Thackeray's who is "faultily faultless." Even though it is an autobiography, and autobiography in his hands especially is sure to reveal the blemishes, we have the impression at the close that we have met at last a perfect hero whom our novelist could not laugh at. For he has doffed his own nature here better than any historical novelist has ever done; he shows little of that tendency to self-involved irony, that perpetual consciousness of the seamy side of life, which has gained for him undeservedly the name of cynic. Esmond has little in him that approaches even the appearance of cynicism. Though he has to record much that is bad in human nature, he insists rather on the finer side. Most of Thackeray's novels

leave us with the impression that the world is full of pretence and hypocrisy and injustice. We rise from this, feeling that there is the soft light of charity and love around all like an atmosphere, softening its asperities, righting its wrongs, and compensating for its falsities. And all this is due to the narrator and protagonist Colonel Esmond.

Thus the novelist has added feat to feat in his art; he has not only made his hero a man of almost faultless virtue in an age of injustice and vice, without losing the reader's interest in him; but he has made him tell his own story, without turning him into a boastful pharisee or mawkish scorner of other men. He has thus accomplished almost the impossible. In *Barry Lyndon* he had made a rogue tell the story of his life with utter unconsciousness of its offensiveness, in fact with pride in its roguery, and indignation that men should so persecute him as to condemn it. In *Esmond* he makes a true and loyal gentleman tell of his truth and loyalty without showing any sense of his exceptional worthiness or any undue or mawkish depreciation of it. He has, in short, painted a hero without over-emphasising his faults, as he has done in other novels, and without using colours that transcend common human tissue, such as most other novelists use.

In such a work of art it is difficult to find the salient feature round which the whole character clusters. In this it is like the heroes and heroines of Scott and Dickens; it has their smooth regularity, their lack of anything to strike the attention, any mastering passion. In this it is unlike the protagonists of Shakespeare's plays, who have ever a dominant feature of character, whether it be a virtue or a vice. Perhaps the feeling that predominates in Esmond's life is loyalty — that strange combination of truth and reverence and love, which may attach to a cause or an idea as well as to a person. It is the keynote of the whole novel. We see it in the little boy of twelve when he meets his patrons, Francis fourth Viscount Castlewood and Lady Castlewood, in the first chapter. There was something of reverence awaiting in his attitude towards the rollicking cavalier; but to his beautiful lady the reverence predominated; her beauty, her grace, her gentle pity awed him, as if she were a goddess; and he never forgot "the sun making

a golden halo round her hair"; she was ever his saint looking down on him with noble and piteous eyes. And the chief and most interesting problem in this novel is the development of loyalty into pure love as between equals. Nothing can surpass the subtlety with which Thackeray paints the gradual passage of the one feeling into the other; for the truth and reverence, intellectual qualities to a large extent, predominate in loyalty and take from it the great warmth and strong emotion that belong to love itself. How, without losing his reverence or sincerity towards his patron, Harry Esmond came to find the love predominate in his attitude to her and grow into a passion is the main story of the book.

And we can see excellent reason for the supremacy of this emotion in him from his birth and training. Not from his father's family, the Castlewoods, had he taken the virtue; for, though they remained as a rule faithful to the Stuarts, their faithfulness was corrupt both in its source and in its object; it arose from no sympathy with what is good and true, but solely from that honour for might or for right once might or still likely to be might, which exists even amongst thieves. His father, Thomas Esmond, had no truth or reverence in him, being guided all his life merely by the passion of the moment, or the fashion or self-interest of the moment; the son of one who had abjured his cavalier faith and submitted to the Commonwealth, he did not remain true to the new faith of his father, but joined the profligate band of exiles on the Continent, and became the apt scholar of all their vices and meannesses. In the retinue of that scoundrelly and poor-spirited saint, James Duke of York, afterwards James the Second, he came to Brussels in 1676; he gave himself up to the villainous amusements on which the chivalrous and gentlemanly cavaliers (Heaven save the mark!) were accustomed to pride themselves. An accomplished liar, he made a victim of a gentle and faithful girl, Gertrude Maes, under the assumed name of Captain Thomas. The only shred of a virtue that he or his fellow-exiles had was the point of honour; and in a duel that followed on a gaming-house brawl, he was wounded almost to death; during what seemed his last throes he sent for her, adopted the Roman Catholic religion, and was married to

her under his assumed name. He recovered and, heartlessly deserting her, made her afterwards believe that he had been married before ; in disgrace and poverty in London he scraped up an acquaintance with his elderly cousin, the cast-off mistress of James the Second, and when by her father's death he became Viscount Castlewood, after discovering that his former wife had had a son and was in a convent, he removed the boy to Castlewood and had him brought up as an Esmond but in ignorance of his birth. And not, till Harry Esmond had grown to manhood, and his whole character was formed, did he know that he was no bastard, but the true heir to the title and estates.

Herein we have the solution of his character. He had the good luck to draw only the looks from the aristocratic father, whilst he had his whole nature from his peasant mother. Simple and true she must have been, though fascinated by good looks and fine manners ; incapable of suspecting what was false in her lover and husband, impressing even his profligate and lying heart with admiration for her purity and truth, humility and sorrow and loyalty must have been branded into her nature, when she was thrust forth in disgrace from her father's home and thrown on the world. Nor did she know aught of the evil side of her husband till he wrote her the false confession of his former marriage. Only the romantic and chivalrous view of him could have passed through her mind into the nature of her child.

Thus we can see the source of the sadness and humility that belonged to him ; his melancholy that won him the name of Don Dismallo at Cambridge, and the Knight of the Rueful Countenance in the camp, was constitutional, though it was nursed by the sorrows and disappointments he met in life. And, though he drew his chivalry from the ideal which his father appeared to be, it was through his mother's thoughts and feelings he received it, and he took none of the scorn or pride or other vices that his father showed so profusely. On the contrary, he was never other than humble-minded. For the lowly tenderness his mother gave him as an instinct was strengthened by his boyish experiences. Brought up in a Huguenot weaver's household in France and then in England, at first tenderly by Pastoureau,

the cousin and first lover of his mother, and afterwards rudely and cruelly by the second wife of old Pastoureau, the sense of poverty and suffering was burned into his young soul. Born a Catholic, he was trained in childhood in the austerities of a French Puritan household; in later boyhood he came under the influence of Father Holt and with his great sense of reverence he looked up to this Jesuit as a hero and determined to follow in his footsteps and become a Jesuit too. But a new loyalty—that for the new Lady Castlewood—brought him back again to Protestantism; and under this influence he reached manhood and remained true to that faith. For he came to feel how artificial Father Holt had been in all his mystery and pretence of omniscience, how intriguing and false he was, how far from the soul of honour and charity. What he gained by these transferences of faith was not hot proselytism, as is so often the case, but a grasp of the common elements of all faiths, a scorn of all that is mean or harsh in any one of them and a calm tolerance of all. And this is the attitude mankind must reach before religion becomes the protector of all that is good and true in the world. Never will man by any possible means accomplish unity in it, never till spiritual death reign supreme. And never will the sects and divisions and forms of it cease to persecute each other, if not politically and physically, then socially and spiritually, till this is the universal attitude.

But there was a more penetrative discipline than this working into his life throughout his youth. It was the sense of the stain upon his birth and name. Thanks to the cruel conduct of his father and the cruel reticence of Father Holt and his patron, he did not know the truth till the death of the last. And by that time the belief in his illegitimacy, and the ignorance of father or mother, had ploughed their discipline deep into his nature. Doubtless even when a little child in the Huguenot household he had felt the sting of insult; for the coarse matron, that beat and abused him, would not omit this effective weapon of torture; and his playmates would in their little spite torment him with it as only boys can torment. But the worst was to come; to a sensitive, loyal nature like his there

is no agony so great as the look of pitying reproach in the eyes of one we reverence and love ; and never up till the death of the wicked old dowager Lady Castlewood who had been married to his father, never till full manhood, could he look up into the face of the mistress, whom he worshipped almost as a saint, without finding or seeming to find that expression there. The taunts of clumsy boys like Tom Tusher, the jeers of rakes like Lord Mohun, the patronising good-nature of his little pupils were nothing to bear compared with this. Nor dare he say a word in deprecation or defence. But the anguish it gave was all the finer discipline for its having to be borne in silence and for its being from a nature that was thought saint-like. Thus the power of silent endurance, of unspoken self-control, and unobtrusive self-denial came in early years to him ; he had in boyhood the gravity and thoughtfulness that few men reach by the close of a difficult manhood. And the sweet, wise power it gave him made even light and frivolous and scornful natures like that of Beatrix revere him ; she confessed, when she had reached twenty-six years of age and refused his offer of love, that, though his life was in her power and he was willing to grovel at her feet, she was not good enough for him, she feared him and his wisdom, and fear cannot house with the full passion of love. Even her mother, who was his senior by eight years and looked down with pity on him, had a love for the boy that, as years went on, passed almost into adoration ; she could scarcely tell at first why she resented his devotion to others and regretted any angry word she uttered to him more bitterly than even to her husband. It was only years with their silent tale of magnanimity that revealed to her the reason. It was only the discovery of his long self-sacrifice, his renunciation of name and fortune and title, his surrender of his chance of marrying his love, and all this for the sake of her and her children, that told her how noble he was and why he had so deeply impressed her nature.

And this had even more influence upon his character. Long years of endurance are far more effective than a sudden crisis. On the threshold of manhood he entered on this new course of endurance and self-sacrifice. He had left Cambridge none the better for its learning or discipline

except that it had deepened his hatred of all snobs and parasites : he was adrift from his old purpose of entering the church and he knew not what was before him. Suddenly there came a flash out of the darkness. In his eagerness to protect his patron from Lord Mohun he had followed them to London and tried to draw the quarrel on himself. But all his efforts failed ; and Lord Castlewood as he lay dying wrote a confession of Esmond's birth and title to the estate and name, and made Bishop Atterbury give it to him. Now had come the great struggle of life ; he had only to let the truth go forth to the world and he would be a nobleman with fortune, fit to win the hand of the proud Beatrix Esmond whom he loved. He did not hesitate a moment. He threw the confession into the fire and as it blazed it lit up a picture on the tiles of Jacob cheating Isaac of Esau's birth-right. The years of patient suffering had steeled him to endure another lifetime of misunderstanding and obloquy. For the sake of those he loved he stood and saw his happy prospects fade in smoke up the chimney. And he had to bear the upbraidings of his mistress who cast all the blame of her husband's death upon him that had done his best to prevent it.

Such was the great voluntary self-abnegation of his life ; and without it his character would never have grown so sweet and noble and tolerant as it was ; never will any human character grow truly noble without it. And the best of it for Esmond was that the discipline of it did not cease with the act. Through long years he had to bear the wrongs that came to him from it. The influence of the age upon him was insignificant in comparison. In fact so humane and pure is the character that it might have belonged to any age. He had none of the wild political fervour and bitterness of it. Though a Jacobite to begin with, he came to have great scorn of the Stuart exiles, and though a Tory, he kept up close friendship with such literary Whigs as Steele and Addison, Nor was he greatly affected by their literary ambitions, though he wrote an unsuccessful comedy and a paper "as good as the best in the Spectator" to satirise Beatrix and her affectations. Perhaps its greatest effect on him was to turn his most unwarlike character in the direction of war. But he ever kept his judgement free to criticise its horrors and

the over-weening ambition and treachery of Marlborough, and as soon as he felt that all his fame would not enable him to win her whom he loved, he gave it up. The morals of the age only touched him to make him loathe them ; although he must have heard much that was impure, he never allowed a licentious word to pass his lips. All that he took from it was his reverence for the point of honour and its peculiar method of revenging an insult—the duel. And this was engendered chiefly by his military profession and surroundings. The worst degradation his nature ever suffered was from his passion for Beatrix. He knew how false, hypocritical, unprincipled, and shallow she was, how much a product of the worst elements of this age that he scorned, and how miserable would be his life if he won her hand. She trampled on his best feelings and fooled him to the top of her bent ; yet he could not get clear of this fever of the blood for her. No reasoning, no absence however long, no folly on her part could cure him. Not, till he found her irredeemably impure, given up to the abandoned Stuart Prince, did he renounce the passion that he felt so lowering.

The only good thing it gave him was the discovery of the devotion of Lady Castlewood to him, and her power of self-sacrifice. After she knew how much he had given up for her and her household and how little her dead husband had deserved her love and grief, there was nothing she would not do for her noble benefactor. She tried her best to persuade her daughter to accept him, although she knew how unhappy he would be with her ; for she saw he had set his heart on this. And when this could not be she gave herself up to works of charity amongst the poor and to guarding him from harm and insult. At last, when she was deserted by her children, the life-long loyalty and mutual confidence passed into the closer tie of husband and wife. And peace and happiness seemed to fall on them now they had reached the meridian of life. Esmond speaks of it as his Indian summer. And they spent it away from the vice and folly and hypocrisy of London life on their estate of Castlewood in Virginia. Untroubled by the sound of European wars, untroubled by the ambitions of the military and literary world he had left, he rested at last perfect in

the courtesy that grows out of the deepest wisdom. Had he been trained according to his birth and as heir to the title and estate, in such a haughty, unjust, and licentious age, he would undoubtedly have lost all the advantage of his maternal humility and loyalty, he would have developed all the vices that marked the aristocracy, and never would have taken the burdens he chose to bear, burdens that chastened his spirit and brought him as near to nature's perfect gentleman as nature and the time would allow. It was only the tinge of cynical humour he had in common with his creator that kept him wholesomely human and free from the mawkish sentiment into which the too virtuous is apt to run.

His melancholy added to his perfections would undoubtedly have tended to make him offensively and sentimentally superior, even though his perfections had been forged in the fire of long and silent suffering. But the world seemed to him only a series of mirrors showing, not his virtues, but the absurd littlenesses of his humanity. He could not refrain from laughter at the airs this little creature man gives himself in the midst of the great surge of the ages, and the infinities of existence. And his laughter was, like Thackeray's, self-reflective; he could not help ranging himself with the subjects of his irony. He painfully felt his own shortcomings. And with humour his nature could not fail to turn to this self-flagellative irony; he knew so well to thrust the thought of self away and give his care and love to others, not in a pharisaic, boastful mood, but as the only course there was to take in this so thorny world.

Bad though the age he lived in was, he felt himself a part of it; he knew that the same coarse humanity lived in him as gave such dark licentious colour to the manners around him. It is one of the most striking features of this novel that a character so noble and so pure should have been thrown upon a background so repulsive in its coarseness, into an age that is the most prurient and gross amongst the literary periods of English history. Yet there is a truth in this; it is out of the rankest of soils, rank with the corruptions of centuries, that the sweetest and most delicate of flowers bloom. And if in gross or vile surroundings there

does appear a character of fragile beauty, the contrast seems to strengthen its purity, and ennoble its sweetness: it passes a charmed life, almost unconscious of the selfish and unjust passions that flourish around it.

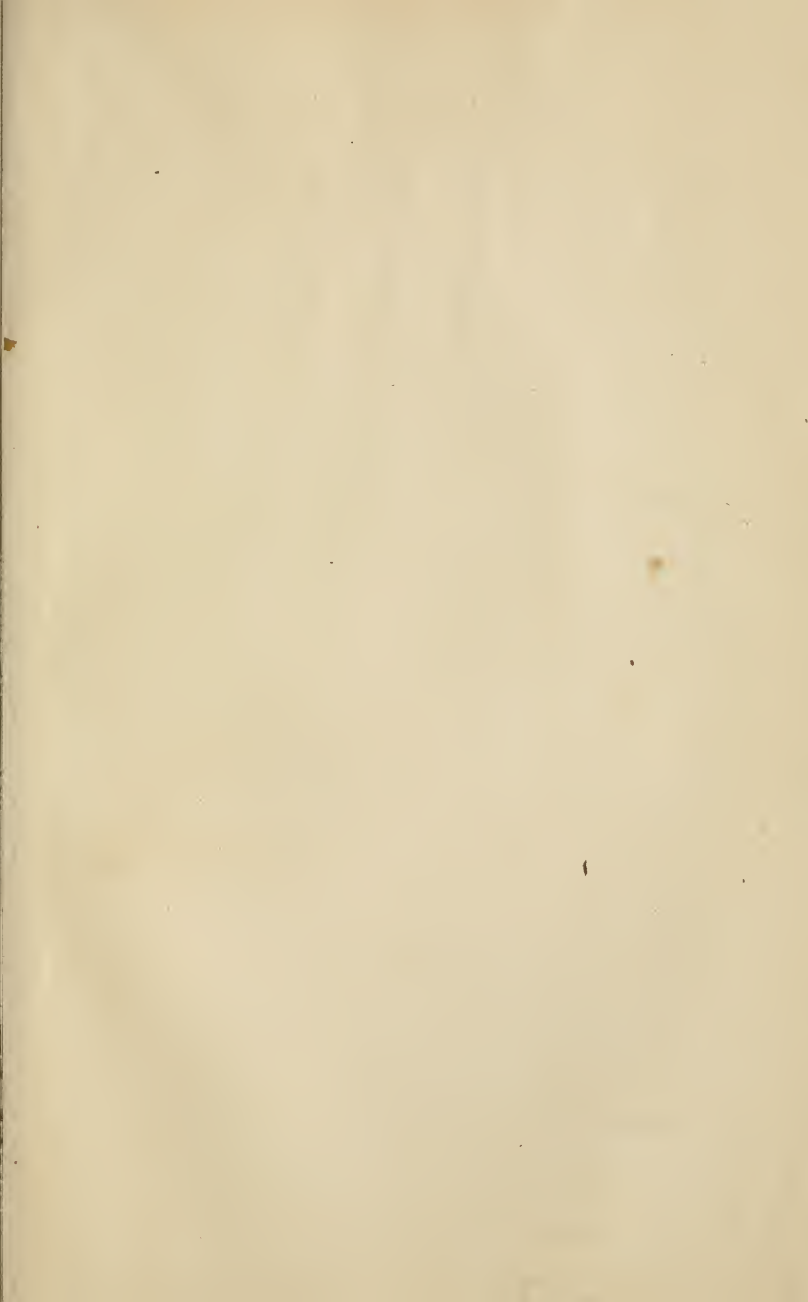
And thus it was with Esmond. Intrigue and falsity were the very atmosphere of his time. We have only to look at the picture drawn of Marlborough to see how its greatest man was, with all his bravery and genius, but a mass of selfishness and corruption and treachery; it makes us shudder to think how the great victories that throw such lustre on the name of England were won by a man so unpatriotic, so ungenerous, so mean in all his actions. We feel that genius in war may go with the nature of a Caliban, and that if anything humane or noble or loving lives in a warlike character it is in spite of the pursuit. Nor was the politics of the age a more ennobling sphere; for in it cruelty and tyranny and double-dealing were supreme. Its finest product, its greatest representative, St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, like Marlborough, is willing to sell his country, whilst he is guiding its affairs. On his lips the names of truth and liberty are the commonest; whilst in his heart and in his acts he never ceases to scorn and outrage them. It is the same with the greatest writer of the time. Swift is the most ungenerous, most over-bearing, most selfish genius that ever touched the hearts of men. None but the arrogant and the servile, the villain and the hypocrite could thrive in such an age. It was unjust and brutal at heart, though it was ever boasting of its refinement and high purpose.

Its very chivalries and romantic ambitions had the most ignoble objects. Who can deny that Jacobitism was the source of much exalted loyalty and brave thought, of much fine emotion and pathetic song? Nothing can inspire a more elevated devotion in a people than the idea of its exiles wandering and forlorn, away from their rightful hearths and homes. And the hero of this book is as deeply moved by such a feeling as any. And yet when we look at its object, we shrink from him in scorn and loathing; a frivolous-hearted youth tainted with the corruptions of his vicious ancestry, unstable as water, led by the coarsest passions, ready to plunge into every sink of debauchery.

It fills the soul with melancholy and despair of human destiny to see the wealth of truth and loyalty, of noble thought and feeling, wasted on such ignoble causes throughout history. Our hero abandons the quest in weariness and scorn, and takes his affection and enthusiasm away to a newer world, untainted by the vices of long generations.

For against the untruth and wrongs and brutality of the times his loyalty stands out like a pure flame of fire upon the burning heap of matter it purifies to ashes. And there is no virtue, short of the self-sacrifice on which it is based, that is so noble. Loyalty takes away the sting from life. It gives a firm footing amid all the uncertainties of existence. It is the one thing that will stand the decay of time. And as, when we discover even the petty hypocrisies and falsities that make up so much of human intercourse, we abhor them as evidences of the dark and demoniac elements of the world, so, when we meet with truth and loyalty, we seem to touch the very height of heaven, to place our feet upon the foundations of the universe. If ever mankind is to progress, to rise above the bestial nature on which humanity has been primarily built, then must it be through loyal hearts. We stand in the darkness of our blind life and reach out for truth and loyalty, if only we might find them. Amid the shadows and shifting phantasmata that circle us round, we cry out for some heart to lean upon: and nothing comes so near to breaking the solitude of this strange life of ours as a loyal friend. It is this cry that finds expression in Thackeray's noblest book and noblest character.





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